

BANDWAGON

JOURNAL OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY



John Ringling North 1903-1985

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This Month's Cover

The photograph of John Ringling North on this month's cover was taken by Rosalie Hoffman at the Monte Carlo Circus Festival in 1980.

DEHAVAN, WISCONSIN CIRCUS CENTENNIAL PROGRAM, JULY 23

One hundred years ago, in 1885, the Holland-McMahon World Circus was organized in Delavan, Wis. The centennial of the show will be observed July 23, when several events are scheduled in the southeastern Wisconsin city under the joint sponsorship of the Delavan Historic Preservation Society and Cousin Otto's Clown Alley #22. The program:

9:00 AM—Raising the Franzen Bros. Circus big top at Veterans Memorial Park.

10:30 AM—Memorial program at burial site of Joseph B McMahon in Spring Grove cemetery. Conducted tour of other Hol-

land-McMahon Circus personnel buried in Spring Grove and St. Andrews cemeteries.

1:00 PM—Unveiling of life-size fiber glass statue of elephant and clown in Tower Park. Circus band music, elephant rides and dedicatory program.

4:00-7:00 PM—Performances by Franzen Bros. Circus.

A circus historical exhibit will be displayed in the Delavan Chamber of Commerce Art Museum Building, 52 E. Walworth Ave., July 20-28.

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DUES PAYMENTS DUE

Early in May dues and subscription notices were mailed. If your payment is not received by July 15, 1985 you will be removed from the mailing list and the May-June issue of the *Bandwagon* will be the last one you will receive.

Don't miss a single issue. Send your payment at once to make sure you remain on the mailing list. Membership cards were sent with the notice, but this does not mean that you are paid for the coming year.

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CIRCUS LIFE IN PICTURES

Some circuses are already on the road for the 1985 circus season, I will also put myself before the readers of *Bandwagon* with my beautiful circus picture book, 6x9 inches, 100 glossy photos enlarged from Kodak pictures. My Kodak took 92 of these pictures, because I was a circus acrobat with several circuses. These pictures were taken in the 1920's and the 1930's. These picture books could be called a 'souvenir of past circus life when most circuses were still traveling by rail. All pictures are captioned. See how circus animals were unloaded at the railroad siding, or 6 or 8 large draft horses pulling large circus wagons. Some pictures were taken in the back yard of the circus grounds, a place the general public never gets to see. I have received praise for having published such a beautiful circus picture book. With each circus picture book that you will order I will enclose for FREE 2 bumper stickers concerning the lives of some people. All books will be autographed, therefore, type, print or write your name clearly. Each book is \$5.00 postpaid. Send check or money order, not cash, to Johnnie Schmidt, Route 1, Box 122, Concepcion, Texas 78349. I thank you for your orders, Johnnie.

JOHNNIE SCHMIDT VISITS CARSON AND BARNES CIRCUS

On April 1, 1985 when Carson and Barnes Circus was in Alice, Texas, Johnnie Schmidt drove 32 miles to spend the entire day on the Carson and Barnes circus, meeting new circus personnel and former acquaintances of the last two years. Johnnie saw the BIG TOP go up and also saw the BIG TOP come down. Johnnie did not see the matinee show nor the night show. He spent all of his time in the back yard of the circus grounds, gossiping and shaking hands and talking of things of his past life, as, Johnnie was a circus performer in the late 1920's and 1930's, on the triple horizontal bars, teeter-board act, comedy acrobatic act, as a fill-in, in clown alley and in daily street parades of yesteryears.

Johnnie was with the Gentry Bros. railroad circus; Sells-Foto's two train circus; Sam B. Dill's Motorized Circus; Sam B. Dill and Tom Mix's Wildwest combined motorized circus; and the Tom circus and Wild West Show.

Johnnie's age is now 85 years. He has never been in a Doctor's office or in a Hospital because he has never been sick. Johnnie Schmidt's address is Route 1, Box 122, Concepcion, Texas 78349, if you care to write to him. Concepcion is in deep south Texas. I thank all of you, Johnnie.

HOLLAND-Mc MAHON'S WORLD CIRCUS, FRAMED A CENTURY AGO HAD TURBULENT EXISTENCE

By W. Gordon Yadon

The Holland-McMahon World Circus, out of Delavan, Wisconsin, was organized a century ago, in the late fall of 1885. Poetically dubbed, "an Ideal Circus," the show also carried a less complimentary moniker, "the Jesse James Express." Both references had a strong degree of veracity as the enterprise started out as a highly entertaining Sunday school show but later evolved into a grift operation.

During its tumultuous two year existence, the show experienced a catastrophic steamboat collision on the Ohio river and was involved in numerous clowns. The eventful career of Joseph Bryan McMahon, one of circusdom's all-time noted grifters, was launched on this show. Since very little has been written about the Holland-McMahon show, we think it appropriate on its centennial to present this article.

One salient fact—although modest in size, Holland-McMahon featured what was probably the finest leaping corps performing at that time with such stalwarts as Johnny Quigley, Billy Batchelor, Alf Dorian, Aleck Seibert, Sam Bennett, Charles Orville and the McMahon brothers, John and Charles, most of whom consistently executed double somersaults in flight after catapulting off the springboard. Augmented by quality supporting acts, Holland-McMahon presented an estimable performance and it was unfortunate its grift policies marred the show's evaluation in circus history.

Although organized in Delavan, the show was conceived on the 1885 Burr Robbins Circus, on which George F. Holland was heavily billed as a somersaulting equestrian. Also with the show was John McMahon, versatile equestrian, leaper and hurdler. The pair enjoyed a harmonious relationship, and decided at season's end to frame a circus of their own which would play southern river dates over a 12-week winter period.

Holland, only 35 at the time, possessed outstanding credentials as a performer. The son of John and Honora Holland, noted English exponents of equestrian-classical feats, he made his debut at age three on the 1853 Mabie Brothers Circus as part of the family riding and vaulting acts and by his teen years was an accomplished arena athlete. Between 1853 and 1885 he performed with nineteen different circuses. Holland authored an interesting article,

"Recollections of a Lifetime in the Circus Business," which appeared in the 1910 Christmas issue of the *Show World*.

With his parents he traveled with the following shows between 1853 and 1872: Mabie Brothers, Holland and Mosher, Buckley's North American, Holland and Madden, Mike Lipman, Carroll and McGinley, George W. DeHaven, Haight and Chambers, C.T. Ames, Yankee Robinson, P.A. Older and Dr. Edward Backenstose.



George F. Holland, co-owner of the Holland-McMahon Circus, and one of the many show people hailing from Delavan, Wisconsin. Author's collection.

Following his parent's retirement on the latter show, Holland went out on his own, joining Chiarini's Royal Italian Circus where he met and married a 16 year old equestrienne, Catherine Holloway in 1872. As an outstanding equestrian team they later traveled with John Wilson's California based circus, Cooper and Bailey, Dan Rice, Sells-Anderson, John Robinson and Burr Robbins.

Holland's partner for his 1885 circus was 31 year old John S. McMahon, a native of Manchester, Michigan. Although lacking Holland's vast experience in the performing ring, McMahon was a highly regarded athlete. He had been on the

1882 Adam Forepaugh show prior to joining Burr Robbins and also performed on the Barnum, Sells, Cole, and John O'Brien circuses. His brother, Charles, was a stellar equestrian-leaper.

When the 1885 Burr Robbins Circus closed its season at Clinton, Iowa, October 17, and retired to winter quarters at Janesville, Wisconsin, Holland and McMahon had already left the show and were busily engaged in framing their new enterprise at Delavan.

Rose Dockrill Holland, (1875-1966) daughter-in-law of George F. Holland, provided the following relative to the formation of the show during a 1964 interview at her Darien, Wisconsin home: "Mr. Holland was respected by proprietors and performers he had been associated with. He and Miss Kate [his wife] were deeply religious, honest and hard working people and great performers. It was Mr. Holland's intention to own a circus with quality acts that would travel and work in harmony. He didn't think a circus should have to parade or carry expensive wagons and animal acts to obtain patronage. He was strongly opposed to dishonest elements that were permitted to travel with so many shows at the time.

"Mr. Holland was successful in assembling an exceptionally fine program. He wanted my parents [Richard and Elise Dockrill] to join his show but father was taking his own circus to South America that winter.

"My husband [George E. Holland] was only ten at the time and was disappointed he could not accompany his parents on the show as he remained in Delavan and attended school. He had been training in the ring barn at the family home where Dr. Galgano now has his medical office [610 E. Walworth Ave.] and wanted to perform with the others.

"It was Mr. Holland's intent to start out by making a winter tour of river cities in the south by steamboat, then return to Delavan and go out the next spring on cars.

"Mr. McMahon was a partner in the show and was a gentleman, but his brother, [Joseph B.] who was a lawyer, was brought in to assist in the management, and after the river accident took control of the show while Mr. Holland was breaking in a new horse act to replace the ones lost in the disaster.

"He hired uncouth men with bad reputations, brought in all sorts of gamblers and tolerated other unethical prac-

tices. The show started to have trouble in about every city it played because of this element. Mr. Holland and his brother, Edward, tried hard to eliminate the gambling but were unable to do so. They then sold out to the McMahon brothers, returned to Delavan and started a new circus in partnership with Mr. [Everett] Gormley."

When I was practicing podiatry in the early 1950's, one of my patients was Maynard Gormley (1891-1960) who had performed as a clown on the Gollmar Brothers and Frank Hall shows. His father was Everett Gormley, who in partnership with George F. Holland, took out a small Delavan based rail show in 1888-89, after the latter had sold his interest in the Holland-McMahon Circus.

Maynard loved to talk circus history and frequently related stories about Joe McMahon, some of which were in opposition to the earlier views expressed by Rose Dockrill Holland.

Although I did not transcribe his remarks verbatim, I will state them to the best of my memory as follows: "My dad knew Joe well and liked him. A lot of people claimed he was a crook, but dad always figured he was just a sharp operator. About every circus had grift in those days, not just the Holland-McMahon."

"The show didn't have grift at first because Holland opposed it. Then they started playing towns where unemployment and poor crops made it necessary to cut admission to a dime. Joe then brought in grift and saved the show. Everybody liked Joe and he would give a needy person his last nickel. George Sloman, who used to live in Dr. Hill's house on south 6th St., traveled with the Holland-McMahon and told me all about it."

"Holland didn't want any part of the grift and sold his share in the show. Joe continued and was very successful until he got shot and killed out in Kansas. The next season Holland and my dad took out a rail show that was the first to play the Black Hills of the Dakotas. They did okay the first season (1888) but got overcharged by some rail lines the next year and dissolved their partnership. They never had any grift on their show."

The initial mention of the Holland-McMahon alliance appeared in the October 10, 1885 issue of the *New York Clipper*: "Holland and McMahon's World Circus which will operate south by boat this winter, wants sideshow stock as well as a colored band."

The *Clipper* provided more detailed information on the new show in its October 17 issue: "Holland and McMahon's new circus has ordered a 120 foot round top with three 30 foot middle pieces for delivery in Chicago where the show will open in October; also a 60 foot sideshow round top with three 30 foot middle pieces. J.S. (Ike) Shipley signed

on as side show-concert proprietor after finishing the season with Burr Robbins."

The show's general agent was Robert Westendorf of Delavan, a ticket taker on the original P.T. Barnum Circus, who in 1876 assumed the managership of the Barnum confectionary department. His brother, Thomas F., wrote the famous ballad, "I'll Take You Home Again Kathleen."

The October 17, *Clipper* listed the following personnel on the 1885 show: "George Holland and John McMahon, proprietors and managers; Robert Westendorf, agent with five assistants; J.F. Quigley, equestrian director with the following riders: Kate Holloway, John McMahon, George Holland, J. Robinson, Charles McMahon and Marquest; Charles Bliss and Joseph Allen, clowns; Mr. and Mrs. J.M. Ryan, aerial artists; Harry Harrison, contortionist; Mlle Theola, (Mrs. Ryan) flying rings; John Quigley, leaper; James Ryan, Aleck Seibert, J. Bliss and Dody Bender, double horizontal bars; Coleman brothers, classical groupings; Stifney brothers, acrobats and Signor Geronoma, balancer."



Holland's wife, Catherine H. Holland performed on the Holland-McMahon show and many other circuses between 1872 and 1910. Author's collection.

"Concert attractions are: DeHaven sisters, J. Doty, D. Bender, Allen and Worland, A. Siebert, Everett sisters and Mlle Theola. Sideshow attractions are: To-Ti-Koo, George Cordoyes, Zuto Zuingana, Nortana, den of serpents, monkeys and birds, colored band of 7 men, G.G. Hunter, solicitor, J.C. Shipley, proprietor, Frank West, boss canvasman with 16 assistants; 50 men and 40

horses. The show has been doing good business in Chicago and will be there one more week, beginning October 12, at Green and Fulton streets, then Cincinnati for two weeks and then south by boat."

A native born Delavanite, Roy Hollister, (1872-1963) related the following about the inaugural days of the Holland-McMahon show in a 1962 interview: "My father had been a candy butcher on the Yankee Robinson and Buckley Roman Hippodrome shows and knew most of the people connected with Holland-McMahon, and many of them used to hang out at our tavern out at the lake. I used to watch the riders work out in Holland's ring bar at 7th and Walworth, and they were the best I had ever seen. Most of the performers stayed at the old Park Hotel."

"Joe McMahon was the most handsome fellow I ever saw and he married Delavan's most beautiful girl, Nora Madden. The show didn't carry an elephant—in fact I only saw horses at Holland's place. They didn't show here that first fall (1885) but left for Chicago. A month later we heard the news that the whole circus went to the bottom of the river somewhere in Indiana."

"The next spring they reorganized here. They had some railroad cars sidetracked at the depot that Decker painted red, white and blue with fancy lettering. Everybody stopped to admire them when they crossed the tracks at 7th street. I never saw so many pretty ladies in my life who were with the show but they were all married to the performers."

"My friend, Green Fitzer, got hired as a canvasman and I wanted to join him but my father said he needed me at the tavern that summer. Guess it was just as well because the circus ran into a lot of trouble after it left Delavan and Fitzer returned home before the season was over."

"The show opened here in early May [1886] at a lot on Grove street. My father took me to the afternoon show and I never saw such riding and somersaulting flying [leaping] in my life. All the people were clapping, even old Matt Buckley. The Hollands and Charlie McMahon were real good as they rode to the music of a fine band. Johnny Quigley and his wife were the real stars of the show and once had dinner at our house. The show carried a nice bandwagon that I think was built by Newt Francisco's wagon shop. They had a sideshow but didn't use it when they opened here. It was a real fine circus."

Hollister's above remarks are a little ahead of the story so let's revert to October of 1885, when the Holland-McMahon Circus was in its embryonic state. The show left Delavan unceremoniously in early October, making the 85 mile trip to Chicago via rail. Holland-McMahon did not plan to utilize its own cars until the following year as its ab-



Holland's partner was Joe McMahon, the noted grift show operator. He is pictured here on the letter paper from his own show in the 1890s. Note spelling of name. Pfefing Archives.

breviated winter season, for the most part, would be aboard chartered steamboat. Most of the show's equipment had been shuttled to Chicago over a two week period where Westendorf was making arrangements for several stands in the Windy City. Holland's equine stock was the last to depart from Delavan.

Holland-McMahon got off to an encouraging start, enjoying a successful three weeks at various Chicago lots, ending on October 19. How the show jumped to Cincinnati is speculative as neither the *Clipper* or either of the Delavan weekly papers made mention of it, but presumably it was by rail since several dates were played around the Ohio river city in late October and early November.

At Cincinnati, Holland chartered the steamer, *Mountain Girl*, at a cost of \$100.00 per week, to transport the show on its river itinerary. Holland was familiar with the vessel as he had been aboard it a few seasons earlier as a member of the John Robinson Circus during a winter season.

In his 1910 *Show World* article, Holland stated the show, after playing Cincinnati dates, made its first move to Covington, Kentucky. Morale was high as business had been good and lucrative multi-day stands had been set for Louisville, Kentucky; Evansville, Indiana; Paducah, Kentucky; Cairo, Illinois; and Memphis, Tennessee during the first three weeks of November.

Holland-McMahon exhibited at Lawrenceburg, Indiana, November 4, and after two performances at Aurora, Indiana, November 5th, tore down and boarded *Mountain Girl* for a down river run to Rising Sun, Indiana, for a November 6th date. An hour later, a calamity struck the show.

The Holland-McMahon disaster is vividly covered in chapter 12 of John Kunzog's excellent book, *Tanbark and Tinsel*. Kunzog's version and the accounts of the disaster which appeared in the November 7 *Cincinnati Enquirer*, the November 12th *Delavan Republican* and the November 14 *Clipper* are pretty much in agreement as to

what happened on that fateful early morning of November 6, 1885, on the Ohio River.

By midnight the Holland-McMahon Circus was loaded and pulling out of Aurora enroute to its next day's stand at Rising Sun, a few hours down river, aboard *Mountain Girl*. The managerial staff and performers occupied small staterooms on the top deck while the working force was assigned bunks adjacent to the boilers on the main deck. Altogether, about 62 comprised the human cargo along with the animal stock and equipment.

Within minutes after departure, most of the circus personnel were soundly sleeping. However wide awake in the pilot house was captain Ike Thompson and his mate, Ike Smith. Thompson was recovering from illness and unable to stand for a long period, therefore had Smith take the wheel while he gave orders from a chair.

About 1:00 A.M., the *James W. Gaff*, a packet loaded with pig iron cargo, came into view in the distance, and being the upbound boat, had the right of way. Two whistles were sounded by the *Gaff*, indicating it would take the Indiana side in passing. *Mountain Girl* responded with two blasts, to signify it understood.

As the two vessels approached each other, Thompson, from *Mountain Girl's* pilot house, instructed Smith to put the wheel hard over, to assure ample clearance for the passing. However Smith misunderstood the order and put the wheel hard down instead, placing the circus boat on a collision course with the approaching packet.

The *Gaff's* captain immediately detected the perilous situation, sounding three whistles of alarm as both vessels backed down hard. Unfortunately it was too late and the *Gaff's* bow ripped into *Mountain Girl*, just forward of the boilers.

All hands aboard the circus craft were rudely awakened as water rushed in, steam poured out and all lights were extinguished. John King, a canvasman from Cincinnati and Charles Coan, a recently hired chandelier man from Rising Sun, Indiana, were sleeping on the boiler deck in direct line of the collision. Both were trapped and drowned. Also lost were the ten valuable Holland performing horses including the famous trick stallion, "Comet," a cage of monkeys, a den of snakes, an oryx, the side show "mermaid," the big show and sideshow canvas, seats and all other show equipment.

George and Kate Holland were thrown out of their bed by the collision. He raced to his horses but saw they were already beyond help. For a few minutes after the collision, the two vessels were locked together. Ironically, the impact hurtled Aleck Siebert out of his bed, through a stateroom window, and onto the adjacent deck of the *Gaff*, where he landed unhurt.

Holland threw his wife to the *Gaff's* deck, then jumped himself and received minor injuries when he lit on the pig iron cargo. As *Mountain Girl* was rapidly taking on water, many of the trouper became panic stricken, leaped overboard and floundered in the turbid river.

J.J. Hunter, sideshow performer, was commended for assisting many in the water and averting panic by words of encouragement to the frightened swimmers. Ike Shipley and wife aided the occupants of the ladies' stateroom to safety. The Circassian girl, Allie Zaomi, (Allie Foster) Lottie Evers, concert singer and Miss Trumball, daughter of the bandmaster, shared the same stateroom.

Within four minutes, *Mountain Girl* broke away from the *Gaff* and rapidly sank in fifteen feet of water. A stroke of good fortune then took place. The vessel, *The City of Madison*, had gone a quarter mile past the scene but hearing the alarm, turned back to offer assistance. It was one of the few boats at that time equipped with an electric-arc light and parabolic reflector whose carbon candles could shed a strong light for several hundred feet. Arriving on the scene, it illuminated the area and survivors in the river were quickly taken aboard the *Gaff* and *Madison* and returned to Cincinnati.

No insurance was carried on the circus equipment. Holland and McMahon estimated their loss at \$20,000; Shipley's sideshow loss was set at \$1000 and T.C. Trumball, bandmaster, and owner of the bandwagon and four horses, claimed a \$2500 loss. Holland retained the services of a Cincinnati lawyer in an attempt to obtain a settlement from the company which owned *Mountain Girl*.

Two days later Holland returned to the river scene when *Mountain Girl* was

raised. Although salvage pirates had already looted the vessel, he did recover his wife's seal coat and his shirt with a large diamond stud in it. The show's canvas was also recovered a quarter mile down river.

Holland returned to Delavan in late November, his arrival being noted by the *Delavan Republican* in its December 4, 1885 issue: "George Holland reached Delavan on Thursday noon. He says that he recovered his canvas from the wreck and that the steamboat firm has offered to settle, but the terms are unsatisfactory. He has put in claims for \$12,000 damages and has employed one of the best lawyers in Cincinnati." Holland reportedly received \$12,000 from the steamship company, which was found negligent in the accident.

Two weeks later the *Republican* reported in its December 18, 1885 issue: "George Holland is a very busy man these days, buying horses and training them. Holland and McMahon will organize a circus in Delavan this winter and it will be composed of some of the very best artists in the country. It will be remembered that this company had a portion of their show sunk in the river near Cincinnati, but they are adding several new attractions and propose to have the show better than ever."

While Holland and wife were occupied full time breaking in their new horse act, the managerial reins of the show was assumed for the most part by Joe McMahon, the younger brother of John and Charles. Born May 27, 1862, in Manchester, Michigan, he obtained a law degree from the University of Michigan in 1884 and passed up a private law firm opportunity to accept the treasurership of the Holland-McMahon Circus.

Things apparently were progressing smoothly according to the following item which appeared in the December 24, 1885 *Republican*: "Through the courtesy of Messrs. Holland and McMahon, the editor of this paper was admitted to their ring barn at the corner of 7th St. and Walworth Ave. We were surprised at the number and skill of their performers and at the excellent manner in which their fine horses were being trained. The five iron grays that were purchased in Chicago last month are already doing the most difficult ring running and jumping. They have the place well heated and all the performers take exercise each day. There was one thing particularly noticeable about the athletes; there were no amateurs, but all seemed to be experts. George Holland and John McMahon gave a fine exhibition of their riding and we believe they will succeed in having before spring, the most complete and meritorious circus in the northwest."

Edward F. Holland, George's younger brother and former equestrian director on the John Robinson Circus, joined the enterprise as sideshow manager, re-

placing Shipley. Charles E. White arrived in Delavan, March 12, 1886, to assume his duties as general agent following Westendorf's departure.

The April 10, 1886 *Clipper* listed other new additions to the show which included: "Five rail cars; (2 flats, 1 stock, 1 box and 1 sleeper) a 80 x 50 foot sideshow tent; 12 horses and new band and ticket wagons. Newly acquired personnel: George Jannier, equilibrist; DeRoman brothers, posturing and ladders; William Ashe, clown; Frank B. Ward and Harry Keefer, assistant agents; Frank Whitlock, candy stand privilege; John Forepaugh, master of canvas; James Dolan, master of horses; Ed Coleman, master of properties; George Dixon, leader of 10 piece band.

"Concert will include Miss Jannier, Jessie Lewis, Dody Bender, Harry Monroe, Cummings and partner, wildman with two horns brought from Antigua, South America, Patagonian giant, one cage of monkeys, birds, fat woman and Circassian."

The show opened its 1886 season May 1 at Delavan as mentioned earlier in Roy Hollister's recollections. Apparently Hollister's favorable views were shared by the *Republican*, which gave the following review in its May 4 edi-

tion: "The two performances were witnessed by large crowds and all were pleased. This circus, which has quartered here, showed the best athletes and bare back riders in the world. Charlie McMahon's hurricane horsemanship is unrivaled, although John McMahon is not too far behind. Mr. Quigley's leaping and George Holland's equestrian somersaulting was breathtaking. George Madden adds to the entertaining performance. The band is first class and everything is new, making a more pleasing variety than the ordinary circus."

The show was still devoid of grift when it left Delavan, playing Elkhorn and Burlington, Wisconsin prior to what was reported as a very successful two week stand in Milwaukee. The May 14, 1886 *Republican* reported: "Charles E. White writes that Holland and McMahon's show business in Milwaukee is immense. That their canvas is not big enough to hold the people. At 7:30 last Monday evening, standing room was selling at double admission, and before 8:00, they were compelled to close the doors and turn 1000 people away. Tickets have been bought two and three days in advance."

In its June 4, 1886 issue, the *Republican* stated: "Holland and McMahon sold 54,321 admission tickets while in Milwaukee, being one of the best runs on record. Their prospects are very bright, their route being as follows: Oshkosh, June 3, 4 and 5; Menasha, 6, 7 and 8, and Appleton, 10, 11 and 12."

The show advertised a 50-cent admission price during the early part of the 1886 season and sometimes used the title, "Holland and McMahon's Equestrian and Gymnast Congress." Later, admission was reduced to a dime.

Continuing its route as a Sunday school circus, the show played central Wisconsin dates in early June, exhibited five days in Minneapolis, Minnesota, June 21-26, after a June 15-19 stand at LaCrosse, Wisconsin. By July Holland-McMahon played rail stops in Michigan's upper peninsula, where it experienced a blow down at Marquette.

It was about this time that Joe McMahon became ardently interested in Leonora Madden, 20-year old daughter of George and Mary Anne Holland Madden. Her father, a former clown, did a magic act in the concert while her mother, who was a sister of George and Ed Holland, worked a Punch and Judy routine. Leonora, known as Nora, assisted in the family acts which were enhanced by her youthful beauty. Within a year, Joe and Nora were married.

After traveling in Wisconsin, Minnesota and upper Michigan during the early part of the 1886 season, the show played various lots in Chicago throughout most of July and all of August. The long stand was not without incident as the *Chicago Herald* reported in its July 18, 1886 edition:

"A Detached Ear Put In Evidence

The Holland-McMahon Circus charged a dime admission when it played Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin in early August 1887. Circus World Museum, Baraboo, Wisconsin.

Holland & McMahon's World's Equestrian Congress!

WILL EXHIBIT AT

CHIPPEWA FALLS,

Friday & Sat., Aug. 5 & 6!

A GENUINE LEGITIMATE CIRCUS FOR

10 CENTS



THE BEST LADY ARTISTS,
THE BEST BARE-BACK RIDERS,
THE BEST AERIAL PERFORMERS,
THE CHAMPION LEAPERS,
THE CHAMPION TUMBLERS,
THE FUNNIEST CLOWNS.

PRESS NOTICES.

A genuine dollar Circus for 10 cents.—TIMES UNION, Jacksonville, Fla.
We have paid 50 cents to witness its inferior.—MEMPHIS APPEAL.
5,000 people were turned away from Holland & McMahon's Circus last night.—DEMOCRAT, Key West, Fla.
Not a cheap Variety Show, but a legitimate Circus for 10 cents.—BULLETIN, Cairo, Ill.
The best Circus ever in Mobile opened on St. Francis Street last night.—MOBILE REGISTER.

Ladies' and Children's Matinee Every Afternoon at 2 o'clock.

A gang of young fellows from south Halsted street has been having a number of fights with the employees of Holland and McMahon's circus at the corner of Wright and Halsted. During the last few days they have become so vicious that Officer Charles Reissenweber has been called upon to escort the circus people to their lodging at night. Saturday night the gang organized and went through the show. John McMahon, one of the proprietors, in attempting to protect his property, was set upon by three of the fellows, and when nearly overpowered by numbers, bit off the ear of a south Halsted St. man named Bernard Taylor. Officer Reissenweber arrested McMahon on the charge of mayhem. Taylor appeared at the Armory court to prosecute, and taking his detached ear from his pocket, exhibited it to Judge Meech. The court discharged McMahon, saying it did not believe he was guilty of a malicious motive, and was only protecting himself against the assault of a lawless mob."

The *Republican* reported the show did good business during its Chicago run when it printed the following on September 10, 1886: "Holland and McMahon's Circus is having a very successful run in Chicago. In a few weeks they will go south, expecting to return to Delavan about January 1."

It is not known exactly when Joe McMahon saturated the show with grifters, but it may have been the autumn of 1886. When the show played Ohio and Kentucky dates in late October and early November, the previous Simon pure Holland-McMahon Circus was heavy on grift according to the late Dr. H.C. Ingraham of Owensboro, Kentucky, who wrote the author in 1963, stating in part: "Holland-McMahon was rightfully known as, 'the Jesse James Express,' and burned every town it played. A lot of shows had grift, but Holland-McMahon practiced banditry. The show came through our area in the fall of 1886 and nearly caused a riot at every town it played."

On September 11, 1965, the author was privileged to tape a 90-minute interview with Harry Lampkin, then 86 years old, at his Chicago north side home. An equestrian-leaper, Lampkin performed on the 1882 Adam Forepaugh show at age three and over the next 18 seasons appeared with the following shows: Terrell Brothers, Gollmar Brothers, Willie Sells' Paris Hippodrome, Dugan Brothers, George Hall and the Andy McDonald Circus. In 1900 he joined the John Robinson show and in 1905 married John F.'s daughter, Pearl, who died in 1918. Lampkin stated the following in the interview relevant to the Holland-McMahon show: "That outfit had more thieves than they had in jail. Some of my cousins, who were in the Lowande family, traveled for a short time with Holland-McMahon and said whenever they pulled out after

Holland & McMahon's GREAT WORLD CIRCUS

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TWO PERFORMANCES DAILY.

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Evening, Doors Open at Seven, Performance at Eight o'Clock

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Wait for the Big Ten Cent Circus
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Bareback and Manse Rider with her Beautiful Trained Kentucky Thoroughbred

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MR. GEORGE HOLLAND

Without a trial in his Bareback riding and American Bareback riding.

MILLE BELLOTTA THE QUEEN OF THE AIR
SLIDE FOR LIFE

4 FUNNY CLOWNS 4

MR. JOHN QUICLEY, Champion Tumbler and Jumper, who will accomplish a Double Barrel over 14 Hurdles.

MERCEDES, THE CUBAN WONDER, in her thrilling FLIGHTS ON THE FLYING TRAPEZE.

MR. CHARLES BLISS, The ever popular knock-about and SINGING CLOWN.

MR. CHARLES H. McMAHON, TWO AND FOUR HORSE EQUESTRIAN, who is without an equal on earth.

3 THE WORLD RENOWNED DUCROW FAMILY. 3
IN NUMBER, in their Photographic Groupings.

THE COMMANCHE MARQUESE, in his portrayal of Indian Life on the Plains.

40 TRAINED HORSES. 40

40 - STAR ARTISTS - 40

BARE-BACK RIDING, TUMBLING, FLYING RINGS, DOUBLE AND SINGLE TRAPEZE, TRAINED HORSES, DOGS AND MONKEYS.

WAIT-FOR-US!

THE LARGEST SHOW ON EARTH!

Admission to all One Dime

MATINEE FOR LADIES AND CHILDREN EVERY AFTERNOON AT 2 O'CLOCK.

Foster & Roe Print 170 Clark St. Chicago.

The show had this dodger printed for its 1886 Chicago engagement. The McMahon brothers and Miss Katie Holloway, Mrs. George Holland, are listed on the bill. Pfening Archives.

playing a town, they never sat near a sleeper window as the car was usually pelted with rocks and sometimes shot at by angry towners who had been taken by the show's grifters. Towners were actually robbed at gunpoint while attending the sideshow.

"A funny thing, Joe McMahon, who ran the show, was a real nice person and treated everybody square. Al-

though not a big circus, it had better performers than most of the larger shows, but the grift was something awful."

Since the show normally played at least two days at every city, it seems logical that the grifters would stay cool until the final day for obvious reasons.

Holland-McMahon terminated the 1886 season in Florida. It exhibited at Sanford on December 15-16, and also had stands at Tampa and Jacksonville.

The show returned to Delavan in early 1887 and practically nothing about its activity appeared in the Delavan newspapers or the *Clipper*. Very little information on the show's 1887 route exists. The *Republican* reported it was in upper Michigan in July; Phillips, Chippewa Falls and Eau Claire, Wisconsin in August and back to Chicago for a September stand.

Although not substantiated, it's possible the show may have curtailed some of its grift practices in 1887, especially since both George and Ed Holland were so opposed to it. The show added its elite leaping corps that season and fixer W.C. Fitzgerald composed a poem, proclaiming Holland-McMahon, "An Ideal Circus." Recorded data on the show's 1887 season is at a minimum.

Needless to say, the author was elated in 1962 when Leonard V. Farley recommended a book *A Wandering Showman, I*, by David Lano, (Michigan State University Press, 1957) who had traveled with Holland-McMahon late in the 1887 season. A marionettist, Lano devoted four vivid chapters to his harrowing experiences on the show when he was thirteen and breaking into amusement business. He died the same year the book was published.

Lano's book is a lesser known gem among circus publications as it provides interesting sidelights on many of the smaller shows he traveled with including J. Augustus Jones, George Hall Jr., Indian Bill's Wild West, Dr. Walter West's Medicine Show, Hurd and Berry's Sideshow and the James Shelby exhibition.

Lano joined Holland-McMahon at Covington, Kentucky in mid November of 1887 as an assistant to cook-steward, Sol Shayne, and later worked his marionettes in the sideshow. In his book, Lano mentions no grift but provides the reader with an excellent account of the performance, impressions of various show members and a vivid account of a clem.

He describes his culinary department chores with the show: "There was plenty of everything—with second and third helpings for those who wanted them. There was always an abundance of food on the Holland-McMahon outfit. A canvas partition was hung down the middle of the chow tent. On one side the workmen were fed; on the other, the executives, performers and musicians ate. They all got the same food. On pay

day each tipped the waiters according to position. We didn't like some of the musicians and clowns. They didn't draw very high salaries and tipped stingily, but were notorious for complaining."

Lano's review of the performance, especially the leaping act, is exceptional: "I was just settled down when suddenly a trumpet call came from the bandstand, announcing the beginning of the show. From the paddock room came eight perfectly matched, perfectly drilled gray horses, ridden by eight gentlemen riders, each in a short spangled coat and a wide brimmed hat with tall feathers, and each wearing high boots and tights of different colors. They put on a neat drill and a hurry-up finish, then rode swiftly in pairs, back to the padroom. In the meantime, a tall gentleman, whose costume included a Prince Albert coat, a silk top hat and gloves, announced the next act, the leaps, a spectacular performance which most real circus showmen of those days featured.

ing its sides, approaching the start and ready to keep the line of leapers filled. The first leaps were trial leaps—all single somersaults over nothing in particular. After these, the banners would be held up, the tick moved back—farther from the end of the runway—and a few more leapers would do singles. Quigley was always impatient to get the doubles going. We had Billy Bennett with us then. He was very dark, but of the white race, and was a careful double somersault leaper, not so spectacular as some, but a great drawing card. The most famous of all long-distance, double somersault leapers, Billy Batchelor, was with us too. He was getting a little gray and was past his prime, but was still throwing good clean doubles with the best of them—except Quigley. Alf Dorian did singles. Aleck Seibert was a long distance leaper; Johnny and Charlie McMahon did singles. Charles Orville, too, a great leaper, was with the show.

"Eight horses were brought in and stationed side by side, each with a groom at its head. Some of the leapers

blur in the air five or six feet over the horses. He straightened out, dropped toward the tick, a little overshot, but safe, and the catchers checked his momentum. The applause rang out.

"Now two men stood on the backs of the center horses and bent forward so their heads touched, forming an additional barriers to the leaper. The band stopped playing, the snare drum rolled, and Billy Batchelor raced down the runway, hit the end of the springboard with admirable precision, soared up, tucking, turning so fast the eye could scarcely follow him; over and over he went, then down to a perfect landing. He brushed the graying hair from his eyes and saluted the audience.

"Now one more man mounted the horses and climbed until he stood in the hands of the two already on the horses' backs; they lifted him until he stood on their shoulders. Two more men then placed themselves just beyond the last—the eighth horse, and raised a high banner on two standards. Both the distance and height of the leap had been increased greatly. The landing tick, too, was drawn even farther away from the horses.

"Now John Quigley signaled from the padroom end of the runway. With short, quick steps he sped forward on the runway, hit the end of the springboard and receiving the full force of its upward heave, went up and over the horses and all the men and the banners, in a complete double somersault, and alighted, erect but supple, in the exact center of the tick. The audience went wild. Quigley bowed gracefully in all his physical perfection. Then the master leapers returned to their dressing room. They were typical of the brave old school, when leaping was so brilliant a part of the circus Covington saw all this for a dime general admission.

"John Stowe was principal clown with Holland and McMahon. He did Shakesperian clowning—no walk-arounds, no mechanical effects; he held the ring alone and was a great favorite everywhere. Bert Stowe, his brother, worked in the concert. So did John Welch.

"A pretty little blonde was with the show who looked about twelve or fourteen years old, but in reality was none other than the wife of Circus Apollo, John Quigley. I was one of her many admirers. In her short dress and slippers she looked exactly like a doll. She always used to give some boy a nickel to carry her bag to the hotel after the show. She was among the last to leave the lot, for she worked in the concert. Even in her street clothes she looked like a pretty child.

"In the side show, Professor Madden, when sober, did magic. He had a talking dog, Soncho, which said one word—'Mamma'—plain enough to be understood. Soncho was a cocker spaniel and also did a pick-up act. He would take or-



Holland-McMahon used this bandwagon, pictured here on the Holland-Gromley Circus in either 1888 or 1889. Author's collection.

"The springboard for the leaps was made either of osage orange, lemonwood or hickory. The boss property man said that at time there were only two real springboard makers in all the United States. He said Hawkins was the very best, and I have since heard many leapers say the same thing.

"First among the leapers, but not first in line, was John Quigley, a wonderful figure of a man, at that time in the prime of his life. He was blond, handsome, a perfect Apollo of the circus ring. He did double somersaults as easily as fill-in leapers did singles. He tried at all times to be sure everything was all right before attempting a leap. He checked on the runway jacks, the line-up of the runway, and location of the landing tick before taking off.

"The leapers generally lined up so that two or three of them were at top of the runway and the remainder ascend-

now formed around the landing tick to catch any leaper who missed. Seibert, in clown makeup, led off. He hit the board with a bang and its rebound sent him high in a parabola toward the landing tick. While he was in the air, seeming to float, he would take off his clown hat and make faces at the audience, and just as he cleared the last of the eight horses, he would make an amazing quick tuck and complete a single somersault. He would light on his feet in the very center of the tick. No catching was needed for him.

"Next came Billy Bennett, with a bang off the springboard. He went much higher than Seibert, and began tucking at once, so that his body made a

ders from Madden alone. In the side show, too, Harry King did fire eating, sword-swallowing and other magic."

Although Lano did not mention much of the route in his book, press notices in November and December stated Holland-McMahon played dates at Cairo, Illinois; Memphis, Tennessee; Jacksonville and Key West, Florida. With no reference to exact date, Lano mentioned playing Birmingham, Alabama, followed by a stand in Mobile, where a serious clem took place.

"We had an unusually large crowd the last night in Mobile," Lano noted. "We had increased the price of admission. The crowd began to get restive after the show. I overheard the boss canvasser saying we would be lucky to get out of town without a clem. Mobile has a reputation for mixing it up with circus folks after the last show. Well, the clem came.

"I was packing up in the sideshow when two toughs interrupted me. They asked me, 'Where are the damn women?' I told them there were only two ladies with the show and that they had gone to their hotel. My answer did not satisfy them. They claimed a man had taken five dollars from them on the promise he would have two women meet them after the show, and if the promise wasn't kept, said the toughs, they would tear up the show.

"I started to edge away from them. They turned on me and gave me a terrible beating. When I finally fell, they walked off toward the big top. I must have fainted away from the lacing, for the next thing I remember was the sound of pistol shots. Then I heard a crunch like the sound you hear when a butcher hits a steer in the head, and the sounds of picks and shovels before I went unconscious again.

"When I came to my senses, I was stretched out in the passenger car and the ladies were fussing around me with bandages and water. Over on the seat opposite me was Kelly, the boss razor-back. He couldn't sit up or move. Joe McMahon was there in his shirt sleeves, so was Sanderson, who I heard had been a real doctor until circus life called him. A local doctor came aboard the train and examined Kelly and stated he couldn't live through the day.

"Kelly said he wanted cigar and a drink. Nolan went out and got them and told Kelly, 'We don't know how you're going to pull out of this, and if you want your folks to know, you'd better spit it out now.' Kelly just grinned at first, then said, 'I know I won't make it but never mind the folks, but did you get the gang that shot me and mugged up the kid?'

"We had been switched around and were coming back past the circus lot. Nolan said, looking out the window, 'Well, Kelly, the ring bank was in pretty good condition last night, but sometime before dawn somebody must have

buried some carrion in it, from the way the buzzards are flying over it now.' 'Good for you, old man!' said Kelly. 'Turn me over, I want to see that ring bank again.'

"Carefully they turned him on his side. He looked out the window at the circus lot, moving slowly past, but now all bare and deserted except by the dead toughs. 'The last act is on,' Kelly said, and fell back on the seat. Someone thought they heard him whisper, 'Good-bye.' . . . The show was over for Kelly.

"We rode on almost all day. When we stopped at a water tank on the side of a big lake, we buried Kelly in a handmade box under a clump of palmettos. John Welch, who had a beautiful voice, sang, 'Just as I am,' and Sol Shayne, the marks of hangover still on him, stumbled through a few verses of a psalm from Nora Madden's Bible. Harry King found an address in Kelly's belongings and sent a telegram out. An answer came next day. It said: 'Our son, James C. Kelly reported dead in Mobile. Please send bill for funeral care.' We did not answer."



After splitting up with Holland, Joe McMahon took out his own circus which is best remembered for its heavy grift. This lot scene, probably from 1895, shows the locals crowded around one of the games in the McMahon front yard. Pfening Archives.

Lano mentioned playing New Orleans, then shipping to Morgan City where the rail cars were sidetracked while the show went aboard the stern-wheeler steamer, *Pauline*, for bayous and inland waterway dates. Lano mentions spending Christmas, 1887, at

Shreveport, where Joe McMahon gave him a new suit of clothes with a dollar in the trousers pocket. From Shreveport the show played plantations and hamlets on the waterway complex in Louisiana.

"At Plaquemine, a man was found dead near the horse tent with his throat cut. Nolan, as boss hostler, was held responsible although he had not even been on the lot at the time, and I told the police so, but they would not listen and took him away. Nolan appeared before the police magistrate and pleaded not guilty. I gave my testimony, which apparently had little weight in that court. Nolan was found guilty and sentenced to thirty years in prison at Baton Rouge. The McMahon outfit wired for a firm of criminal lawyers in New Orleans to come and defend Nolan, but it did no good. I went down to the jail and gave Nolan all the money I had—three dollars."

Lano left Holland-McMahon after the Nolan incident. The show completed its Louisiana bayou route and the partnership was terminated. John McMahon took out a show the following season

playing California and Pacific northwest dates. After five seasons he became ill with tuberculosis and died, November 17, 1892, while his circus was being shipped from Portland, Oregon to Chicago to be sold.

Joe McMahon continued active in grift show operations until killed in a shooting affray at Wichita's Manhattan hotel, April 2, 1897. George F. Holland returned to Delavan to frame his new Holland-Gormley Allied Circus, a six-car show that was out during 1888-1889; then joined the John Robinson Circus for three seasons. After oper-

ating a Delavan Lake hotel for two years, Holland and his wife, Kate, re-joined the Robinson show in 1897; played fair dates with the family act from 1898-1905; toured with Norris-Rowe in 1909 and culminated a long career in 1910 with Sells-Floto. Holland died January 28, 1917 and his wife, January 17, 1944.

Since circus poetry is not abundant, we think it appropriate to conclude this article with Fitzgerald's tribute to the Holland-McMahon Circus with his 1887 poem, "An Ideal Circus."

I have viewed with delight the great archers
Of Austria, Russia and Gaul,
And enjoyed many hours in old England whose athletic feats I recall.
As a boy, famed Dan Rice was my hero,
With Barnum and Forepaugh in line;
But for genuine sport at a circus,
The HOLLAND AND McMAHON outshine.

At the grand entree with the music,
The spangles and glittering sheen
Of richly caparisoned equines,
None finer I ever have seen.
The coterie of wonderful actors,
Resplendent in tinsel of gold,
Encircling the tented arena
Was a dazzling sight to behold.

As of old to the front came his highness,
The genial and popular Ashe,
With a song that delighted its hearers
By its comical humor and dash
Then Quigley the champion leaper
In his wonderful somersault act
With Mac, Jennier, Seibert and Bender,
The audience spell-bound attract.
Through the air—like a Comet—
Theola.

The breathless spectators astound;
While for Holland, the dare devil rider,
A thousand wild plaudits resound,
On a dashing Arabian stallion,
Without bridle or saddle adorned,
By this brilliant equestrian rider
A somersault feat is performed.

The audience smiles with approval
When Ryan steps forth to the bars.
With Seibert, Jennier, Mac and Quigley,
The world-famous gymnastic stars.
'This an act well worthy of notice—
The double bar feat they perform,
And the cheers that re-echo when over
Proved an audience taken by storm.

For equines again in the circle,
Arabia's fleet-footed steeds,
With McMahon, their master so clever,
In his wonderful performing deeds.
Then a double trapeze act by Ryan
And Mlle. Theola so fair—
Whose aerial feats so suprising
Are proof of what gymnasts will dare.



The great tumbling act next persented,
With Quigley and Mac in the lead,
Ryan, Seibert, Jennier, Doty Bender,
And Master Ashe in their evolving speed

Was received to generous ovations
And merited well the encore,
For ne'er in this great western city
Was its like ever witnessed before.

But the climax was reached when Miss Kate,
The beautiful side saddle queen—
On her spirited charger—Adonis,
In their daring performance was seen,
Though Comet no longer was with her,
All who witnessed her feats truly say:
The world has but one lady rider
And that is fair Kate Holloway.

The burlesque of Ashe was in order
And served as a happy relief,
To the deeds of the great forest terror,
Charley Mac—the Comanche Chief.
The wonderful mid-air performance
Of Willie the circus Mascotte,
Were thrilling to every beholder,
Nor soon will the same be forgot.

The great bounding jockey, McMahon,
Was clever in every extreme,
And elastic in physical culture,
At least so his efforts would seem.
No cleverer bit of speech making
And audience plaudits e're one,
Of imitable Joe Davidson.



Miss Pauline, the danseuse so graceful,
Tripped gaily the fantastic toe,
And the ballads of pretty Miss Jennier
Were touched with a musical glow.
Doty Bender, the Irish comedian,
Was at home with his quaint Gaelic lore,
Brought Doty a hearty encore.

The well-cultured canine of Madden
Illustrate the stories we hear
Of the wisdom displayed by such creatures,
When method of action is clear.
There's Ziegler, the leader, and Sloman,
And the one what converses you know;
When addressed by acute Punch or Judy,
He wisely responds with "Oh no."

There's the sideshow so gay and attractive
With Bristol so gracious and bland,
Who will show alligators he captured
Off the banks of a South Sea Island.
Joe McMahon will smile as you enter,
Smile twice if you're youthful and fair,
And Zimmerman bow like Lord Roscoe
As he finds you a comfortable chair.

High over the canopied turret,
A streamer floats out of the air;
"Success" is the motto emblazoned,
No frauds wanted here—all is square,
Though fire on the old Mississippi
Swept all to the bare water's edge,
Like a sphinx she arose from the ashes,
With "Success" once again for a pledge.

Over the past twenty years, many individuals have provided information utilized in this article. In addition to sources mentioned in the content, the author thanks the following for their assistance: Catherine Holland, Bette Leonard, Red Sonnenberg, John Van Matre, John F. Polacsek, Ted Bowman, Tom Parkinson, James J. Moran, Leonard V. Farley, Fred Dahlinger, William McCarthy, Robert Parkinson, Fred Pfening III, Dan Draper, Orin C. King, Al Conover, and the Circus World Museum Library and Research Center.

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THE AL G. BARNES' WILD ANIMAL CIRCUS

1923

By Chang Reynolds

The 1923 tour of the Al G. Barnes' Circus was a problem year marked by labor and transportation difficulties, very inclement weather, and illness and injuries to show personnel. Although the show moved as far into the eastern states as it ever had gone, thus invading new territory for this circus, the move did not compensate for other difficulties. There was a great deal of opposition with the Sells-Floto Circus and some billing problems with the Gentry-Patterson show. At the conclusion of the tour Barnes was probably quite content to return to Barnes' Circus City in Palms, California, with the whole year behind him.

Although Love Field in Dallas, Texas, may have been a great location for pilot training, it is doubtful that it furnished the facilities for a wintering spot that benefited a circus the size of Al G.'s show. At the least it could not have furnished the comfort provided by the Palms location. Barnes, Harley Tyler, the manager, and other show personnel spent the winter in the vicinity of Los Angeles. Ed Woeckener and Cheerful Gardner had moved to the John Robinson Circus, and others who had been associated with the Barnes' Circus, also departed. Among them were Alfred Wolfe, auditor for many seasons, who decided to devote his energies to the public market which he had successfully established at Palms, California. That effort did not last for long, for he returned to the circus within a couple of years.

By the middle of February, John Aason (the Norwegian Giant) and Dick Wayne Barlow, who combined to operate the Barnes' sideshow in 1923, placed "Want Ads" for the kid show. About this same time, a lion, in transit from Montana to the show's quarters in Dallas, escaped from a Rock Island express car northeast of Fort Worth. After

considerable excitement the animal was killed and the hide shipped to the Barnes' quarters at Love Field.

Early in March, Al G. Barnes and Harley Tyler returned to the quarters in Texas and promptly fielded a full-page advertisement in *Billboard* regarding the approaching season's "triumphal tour of the United States." This advertisement was rather remarkable in that a special invitation was extended "to those showmen lacking in originality, whose obvious efforts to offer a somewhat similar program by unblushingly appropriating the Al G. Barnes novel and distinctive acts and features have been so futile as to insure 'The Show that's different' remaining in a class by itself." This statement was probably a thrust at circuses which had lured away the Barnes' trainers—in particular the John Robinson Circus.

The season's opening date was scheduled for Saturday, Sunday, and Monday, March 24-26, in Dallas, Texas. The three days were selected to compensate for the fact that "America's Original and Only Big-Four-Ring Wild Animal Circus" had not appeared in Dallas for six years. It had played that city on 11 September 1917 and had been shipped from Dallas in 1918 when it closed early in that year due to the flu epidemic. It had not played that town, although scheduled to do so.

The 1923 program was to feature a new and enlarged edition of "Alice in Jungleland" which was to set the pace for all other spectacles planned by other circuses. The parade would also contain

Al G. Barnes cages on the lot at Ithaca, New York, July 11, 1923, during morning set-up. Note at extreme left one of the three former John Robinson Ten Big Shows cottage type dens the Barnes show had. Photo by Frank Farrell in Frank Pouska Collection.

"in its white and gold mile and one-half length novelties which would prove of interest to imitative showmen." But, the greatest attractions of all presented for the first time anywhere were "American Eagles Broken to Perform — Giraffes in a Mixed Animal Group — A Startling Reindeer Act. Rehearsals, under the direction of Robert Thornton, equestrian director, were to begin three days prior to the opening. All performers were ordered to report to Thornton on or before March 21.

The exhibition of giraffes with the Al G. Barnes' Circus continued to be reported in *Billboard*. It is not known how many of these animals were actually imported at this time, if any. The one verified report is of two giraffes that arrived at Ansel Robinson's animal center in San Francisco in 1924. Apparently one died at Robinson's place and the second did reach the Palm's quarters but never went on tour.

A lengthy report of the three-day opening appeared in *Billboard* in that magazine's issue of 7 April. It was stated in the opening paragraph that the lengthy opening date was a compliment to the City of Dallas and the Dallas Zoo. As result the zoo profited financially from the relationship and the circus was not taxed. Three breeding lions remained at the Dallas zoo and a large crocodile remained there as a permanent gift.

Featured acts were a group of American Eagles presented in a riding act under the direction of Max Sabel; Robert Thornton's troupe of wild African boars; an American bison drawing a wagon; "a giantess blood-sweating hippopotamus [Lotus] driven to a jump cart by a young woman in gay trappings; and a tandem hitch of zebras."

Musical scores for "Alice in Jungleland" were written by Jessie G. M. Click and Oliver Wallace. Lettie Le Clair was the prima donna and Jack Devon, from Indianapolis, sang the male role opposite her. Dot Whitney played the role of "Alice."

The reviewer noted with enthusiasm the fine condition of all the animals after their long lay-off at Love Field. Among the beasts which were presented during the program, especially noted by the writer, were the giant Tusko with Al G. Barnes perched on the



big elephant's back; the lions, tigers, leopards and pumas presented by Captain Louis Roth, Allen King, Nellie Roth, Pearl Linge, and Margaret Thompson.

In addition to Tusko, three young elephants, which arrived on the circus in mid-winter, had been trained to perfection by "Red" McKay and Joe Metcalfe. The elephant herd consisted of Babe, Ruth, Jewel, Pearl, Vance (male), Barney (male), Jenny, Tusko (male), Sedro (male), Palm, Culver, Venice, and perhaps another youngster named Smudge. The fine young female, Venice was sent to Washington Park Zoo in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, on 8 June 1923 and replaced by the mature female, Countess, from that zoo. There is a report that Countess had been with the Barnes' Show in earlier years but the records of the zoo do not support this. William Woodcock criticized this trade by McKay because Venice proved to be a fine elephant.

The collection of clowns on the Barnes' Show in 1923 was headed by Austin C. King and included Bill Tate, Bert Leo, Jack Chase, Jack Klippel, Dan McAvoy and others. The new film attraction, "The Shiek" featuring Rudolph Valentino was providing great attention at a Dallas theatre and Austin King gave the circus fans a great parody of this during the clown turns. The discovery of the Tomb of Tutankhamen was also in the headlines and the clowns developed this in their antics. Bert Leo featured his clown canines as usual, and McAvoy got many laughs with his six-legged cow.

One of the highlights of the performance was the presentation of the beautiful horses ridden by accomplished horsewomen. Credit for this great act was given to Robert Thornton, Max Sabel, Merritt Belew, Nita Belew, Katherine Thompson, Ova Ashworth, Pearl Linge, and the ensemble of riding girls. These Barnes' horses really danced to the scores that were furnished by "Bud" Rummell's band. They performed sedate waltzes, snappy two-steps, stately marches and reckless jazz steps. Specialty dances were undertaken by horses ridden by Merritt Belew, Katherine Thompson, and Ova Thornton whose horse walked on its hindlegs.

A second horse act drew equal enthusiasm from the patrons. It was the Liberty act in two rings presented by Merritt Belew and Max Sabel. Twelve in each ring; with the cream-colored equines directed by Sabel and the black-and-white spotted horses handled by Belew. The maneuvers of these animals were performed with precision and skill.

The performance was concluded with a striking bit of pageantry which consisted of ten of the speediest horses flying around the hippodrome track with the driver dressed as Uncle Sam. A hundred-foot silk United States flag on



Al G. Barnes on the lot at Ithaca, New York, July 11, 1923. In right foreground is the general admission (red) ticket wagon. Photo by Frank Farrell in Pfening Archives.

either side of the team whipped and fluttered as the horses made their wild dash.

The review noted with pleasure the "clean, snappy lines" of the two side-shows placed outside the big top. Not only did Barnes provide new canvas, but according to the report, "newer and bigger acts than ever presented before" were under the tops. The side-show roster was not complete at Dallas for William K. Peck was in New York City to chaperone a group of eleven midgets recently arrived from Hungary. These were the famous Klinkhardt Troupe. John Aason, the Norwegian giant, had not arrived from Hollywood at the time of the opening. Eddie Reece, the 138-pound strong man, performed iron-chewing stunts and allowed a big touring car, heavily loaded with passengers, to roll across his chest. Reece also performed in the concert with the wild west attraction.

The Barnes' Show began the season under the active direction of Al G. Barnes and Harley S. Tyler, general manager. Frank Cassidy, Thomas Dawson, and Allen Reid handled the press work. Murray Penneck was general agent, and at the time of the opening was paving the way for the tour of the Eastern States. Advance Car No. 1 was

Al G. Barnes during set-up at Ithaca, New York, July 11, 1923. Baggage stock teams are moving wagons in foreground while in back is the sideshow bannerline. Photo by Frank Farrell in Pfening Archives.



in charge of the veteran, W. J. Erickson. It had twenty-four men working from it. The No. 2 car, with sixteen men, was in charge of the equally capable Frank D. Garrigus.

J. C. (Candy) Shelton was in charge of the Number One Side-Show with Dick Wayne Barlow supervising the annex. "Jake" Jacobson had charge of the privileges. W. K. Peck, as usual, took care of the front door and was assisted by Everett Whitney. Melvin Penneck handled the down-town ticket wagon. W. E. Haines and Dixie Engle were assistants to Murray Penneck, the general agent and traffic manager. Frank Cassidy did not join until later in the tour since he was shepherding the Warner Bros.' floats from New York on a trans-continental publicity trip. In the meantime, "Skinny" Dawson and Rex de Rosselli, his assistants, handled the publicity.

Early in April, Max Sabel wrote to *Billboard* regarding his act with the eagles. He stated: "I am the first in the United States, and I think in the world, to suggest the possibility of training eagles. One day six eagles arrived for me to train, and I trained them. These eagles ride on ponies in combination and know their mounts. They loop-the-loop and return to the ponies." There is no doubt that this eagle feature and the reindeer act were new and important features of the 1923 Barnes' program.

Inclement weather soon struck the show. The first two days in Dallas were spent under clear skies and with good crowds, but the third day brought on the rain which lasted for two straight weeks. The circus lost Mexia on the 28th and Port Arthur, on 4 April, and had to pass up five matinees during the



Al G. Barnes on the lot at Ithaca, New York, July 11, 1923. A canvas covered cage is in center while other cages are

shown on the right. At left is portion of the Rhino Tableau. Photo by Frank Farrell in Pfening Archives.



Al G. Barnes loaded flat cars, season of 1923. Bill Elbrin Collection.

first three weeks. The first eleven days of the tour were spent in Texas and, after the Port Arthur rain-out, the show entered Louisiana at Lake Charles. It returned to Texas to play Orange and Beaumont at the end of the second week and then picked up Shreveport in Louisiana and Marshall in east Texas, before moving into Arkansas. A later report confirmed the loss of five matinees and two entire stands during this period of bad weather.

At the beginning of the fourth week the Barnes' Show was in Tennessee for three dates and then made some stands in Kentucky. By the 28th of April it reached Newport, Kentucky, across the river from Cincinnati. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus was billed for two days in Cincinnati, April 30 and May 1. This Corporation show had opened on April 28 in Louisville, Kentucky (the day the Barnes' Circus was in Newport) and the Cincinnati stand was its second of the season. This Corporation show finished the week in Ohio and then moved east into West Virginia while the Barnes' show continued its route with two additional weeks in Ohio before going to Michigan. Al G.'s outfit lost the stand at Massillon, Ohio, 9 May, due to cold weather and a blizzard. The snow struck the show at Alliance shortly after the night performance began and, although it moved on to Massillon, it did not unload in that city.

The John Robinson Circus had opened at Marion, Indiana, on 21 April and played Ohio dates during its second week on tour. It then picked up some stands in West Virginia but returned to Ohio by 2 May. Neither the Hagenbeck-Wallace nor the Robinson Circus day and dated the Barnes' show; neither did they play the same cities, but all three circuses were in the same state at this time.

The "big one" of the Corporation, the Sells-Floto Circus, had made its usual opening in the Chicago Coliseum and

was under canvas at Peru, Indiana, on the 23rd of April. It picked up three Ohio dates at the end of the month on its way East. Providing the weather was good and transportation easy it would have been a wonderful two weeks for the circus fan. Imagine the possibility of witnessing the Al G. Barnes, the Hagenbeck-Wallace, the John Robinson, and the Sells-Floto Circuses within a fourteen-day period!

The Barnes' Circus moved without opposition into Detroit, Michigan, for a two-day stand on May 14-15. It spent two weeks in the state before returning to the central region at the end of May.

From Newport, Kentucky, a *Billboard* reviewer wrote a glowing description of the show. "It classes as the largest, liveliest, and most tuneful, colorful, gay and awe-inspiring exhibition of animal training in the magical history of Al G. Barnes," he wrote. This writer gave a more complete list of staff members than had been reported earlier. They were: Harley S. Tyler, general manager; Wm. K. Peck, assistant general manager; Charles C. Cook, general superintendent; Everett Whitney, in charge of the front door; Charles Bouleware, announcer; "Egypt" Thompson, trainer; Frank Rooney, boss hostler; "Shanty" Long, boss canvasman; Robert Thornton, equestrian director; Melvin Pennock, downtown ticket sale and commissary; Louis Roth, animal trainer; Nathan W. (Red) McKay, elephant trainer; Fred L. Shafer, supt. of wardrobe; R. C. Beale, in charge of dogs, monkeys, and goats; "Whitey" Veersteeg, electrician; and Jacob Lur, supt. of ring stock.

The side-show arrangement was cleared-up by this reviewer. The No. 1 side-show was under the management of J. H. Sheldon with P. J. Staunton as lecturer. The principal offering was the group of eleven midgets recently imported from Europe. Other platforms were occupied by Eke and Ike, "white

savages from Ecuador;" Jolly Ray, fat girl; Paul Desmuke, armless wonder; D. C. and Mrs. Ranger, mind readers and illusionists; orang-utangs and the "wild bushmen" (the pin-heads); H. L. Morris and his trained baboons and monkeys; Le Roy with Punch and magic; Frank Decker, juggler; Frank Martin, tattooed man; Mrs. H. L. Morris, knife thrower; Arthur Wright's sixteen musicians and entertainers. Bill Tank was chief ticket seller. The top was 80-feet with two 30-foot center pieces and included a fifteen pole banner front.

Dick Wayne Barlow and John Aason, the Norwegian boy giant, had the No. 2 side-show under a 70-foot top with two 30-foot center pieces. The banners occupied eleven poles. In addition to Aason the attractions were Eddie Reece, strong man; Mrs. Bryan Woods, with "Jumbo," a big thirty-one foot snake; Mrs. Evelyn Wayne, lecturing on the Oklahoma outlaw's mummified body; Kisko, fire-eater and glass dancing; "the Smallest Mother and Baby Alive;" and the moving picture dog, "Riley." Bryan Woods was manager and made the openings. Joe Kanard and Friday White were the ticket sellers.

The Concert roster included Jack Cavanaugh, trick riding, trick roping and rope spinning (he worked five loops); Frank Gusky, trick riding, trick roping and rope spinning; Lee Ford, brone riding, pick-ups and trick riding; Catherine Thompson, trick riding; Lee Purdy, rube clown, rider, and "scare crow" dancing. Two additional features of the concert were Ed Reece, strong man, and the Six Australian Kangaroosters (musical and dancing numbers) who had recently joined.

A complete list of the clowns included: Arthur Borella Trio, Jack Klippel, Bill Tate, Bert Lawrence, "Dutch" Marce, Danny McAvoy, Bert Leo, Fred Leslie, "Hey" White, Jack Purdy; W. W. "Curley" Phillips, Jack Chase, Bill Ward, Charles Fortune, Austin King,

-----PAID ADVERTISEMENT-----

TO THE MEMBERS OF THE CIRCUS HISTORICAL SOCIETY

I am using this method of informing you just what has taken place at the Ringling Museum of the Circus in last few years. The "FACTS" listed in this ad are selected from one hundred fifty such "facts" sent by me to each individual member of the Board of Trustees during the month of March.

FACT #1: Ringling Museum of the Circus, *FIRST TRUE CIRCUS MUSEUM*, in the United States, was started in 1948 in Sarasota with John L. Sullivan as curator.

FACT #2: John Ringling's will did not provide for a Circus Museum building, or any other new structure, on the grounds of his estate which he left for the benefit of the People of Sarasota and of Florida.

FACT #3: Early Circus Museum was overcrowded as it was housed in the building used to house Mr. Ringling's five automobiles. These garage buildings housed two Rolls and three Pierce Arrows.

FACT #4: In the Fifties some "Big Brain" from Tallahassee solved the overcrowding by selling the five automobiles to Horn's Cars of Yesterday for a nice sum. The bill of sale, at the museum, calls for TEN DOLLARS for the five cars. Yes that is right, half a million dollars worth of automobiles for TWO DOLLARS EACH.

FACT #5: John Sullivan finally left in despair and started the CIRCUS HALL OF FAME. Former Circus Troupers, Mel Miller, left his advertising agency and devoted all this time (for a time without pay) to the almost dead Circus Museum. HE DREW UP A FULL SET OF PLANS FOR THE FUTURE DEVELOPMENT OF THE CIRCUS MUSEUM. At this time Ringling Barnum had quit the nasty old tents and much of the road equipment was for sale.

FACT #6: MEL MILLER HAD MADE AND DREW UP THE FIRST PLANS BY THE EARLY SIXTIES. THE BOARD APPROVED THE PLANS AND GOT HIM THE FIRST FUNDS FOR THE FIRST BUILDING, THE BACK YARD BUILDING.

FACT #7: With funds derived from the sale of the magic equipment that also shared the Circus Museum and \$500.00 of Museum cash, Mel Miller purchased FOURTEEN WAGONS FROM THE CIRCUS. TEN OF THEM WERE NEEDED FOR THE BACKYARD EXHIBIT AND THE OTHERS WERE THE SIDE SHOW FRONT WAGONS.

FACT #8: Funds ran short and Joe McKennon came in and worked over the blacksmith wagon, set up the shop and spotted in the backyard wagons. As this was being done, Mel was pouring the hot mix in the area occupied by the wagons and under their jacked up wheels. Horse shoe tracks, wagon wheel tracks and footprints were embedded in this hot mix before it hardened. In addition, hundreds of dollars worth of plastic weed and grass were set in it.

FACT #9: Circus Museum as planned by Mel Miller (plans revised slightly in 1968-1969 by Joe McKennon) was never intended to be an extension of the Art Museum.

FACT #10: BOTH MILLER AND MCKENNON ENVISIONED AND PLANNED IT AS A CIRCUS INDUSTRIAL EXHIBIT MUSEUM PURE AND SIMPLE.

FACT #11: After Miller left, McKennon took his revised plans to the Trustees and they approved them and got the funds to build the second building in the complex, the present main building to house the Side Show Front exhibit.

FACT #12: Now get this, FOR A TWENTY YEAR PERIOD IN THE SIXTIES AND SEVENTIES NOT ONE THING WAS DONE AT THE CIRCUS MUSEUM BY MILLER, MCKENNON OR HURDLE THAT WAS NOT ACCORDING TO A BOARD OF TRUSTEE SANCTIONED MASTER PLAN.

FACT #13: THE PRESENT MAIN BUILDING WAS PLANNED, DESIGNED AND BUILT TO HOUSE THE SIDE SHOW FRONT EXHIBIT. ANYTHING ELSE IN THE BUILDING WAS TO BE COMPLIMENTARY TO THE MAIN EXHIBIT. Not more than three wagons were ever planned for this room. One parade wagon enclosed in a plastic housing as a "Jewel" and the two ticket wagons.

FACT #14: Neither Miller or McKennon ever became "Wagon Simple" as they knew they could never compete with the attraction in Baraboo. Neither showed any of the wagons seized by Chappie Fox for Ringling Barnum in 1980 in any of their plans as permanent exhibits. Without clear title, they were left in limbo. (With just a little backing from Museum Board I still think I could have beaten the case in court.)

FACT #15: As soon as Chappie Fox took the wagons for the circus, Mr. Richard Carroll, Museum director, started to complain that there had never been any plans for the Circus Museum and he would have to work some out. This despite the fact that McKennon had given him a full set of plans when he came to the Museum Complex. Meanwhile, Mr. Hurdle had resigned and McKennon was back in the office handling the daily operations of the Circus Museum.

FACT #16: In January, Mr. Carroll held a meeting and demanded that a new set of plans be drafted. McKennon resigned as of that date. He was later persuaded to stay under a promise that things would shape up. They did not and McKennon moved his property from the Museum on May 15, 1981.

FACT #17: Almost immediately the Wardrobe Display and the Yancey Model Parade were moved out to make room for the main museum maintenance shop. (McKennon had spent over \$1600.00 of his own cash to install the wardrobe display.)

FACT #18: In the same series of buildings taken by the maintenance department was McKennon's "Scrap Iron Piles." Every conceivable piece of hand wrought iron that might be needed on a Ringling Barnum wagon (bull rings, fifth wheels, possum belly hangers, brake systems, axles, ladder irons and two train loading "schutes," thirty foot lengths of 30" channel iron) had been carefully kept. Planned to make displays of the "shapes" besides the portable forges they had been wrought in.

FACT #19: On returning home to Sarasota in fall of 1981, McKennon found that every piece of this irreplaceable iron had been scrapped by Carroll and his minions. Much of it had been cut with torches to load out. McKennon visited junk yards over the entire Tampa Bay region trying to locate it, but the smelters already had it. (I would gladly have paid \$5000.00 just for the "shapes.")

FACT #20: The fall of 1983 found the MUSEUM DIRECTOR HAD REFUSED ALL EFFORTS TO GET JANITOR SERVICE FOR THE BUILDING. NOT ONE PENNY WAS EVER AUTHORIZED FOR SUCH SERVICE. McKennon had cleaned it a few times using grounds crew members (unauthorized) on rainy days.

FACT #21: There is a beautiful model of the new design for the back yard over in the Art Museum. (Just a few open display booths. Wagons were to be in ranks, just like a miniature Baraboo.) I understand this is the product of some Marine Museum person from New England. If so, THAT IS JUST AS STUPID AS HAVING A VETERINARIAN DO YOUR DENTAL WORK.

FACT #22: Understand there is a plan on foot to do away with the side show front exhibit. (Never have liked the paintings myself. Director refused to let me hire Circus Banner painters at my own expense to do them.) Destroying the Front exhibit would be in keeping with the thinking existing when Hurdle and McKennon put it in. (A person from education department insisted we break it up and put two wagons on each side of the building.)

FACT #23: Over McKennon's protests in 1980, all the Yancey Display materials were scrapped and sent to dump. Display peg boards, aluminum booth rods and booth curtains, all the model rail track, etc. etc. was "red lighted." (Amusing thing about it, all of it belonged to Yancey estate and was on loan to the Museum.)

FACT #24: Since McKennon left the Museum, the display materials used on the wonderful Hallmark Exhibit of Ringling Circus Museum's artifacts during the last world's fair in New York have been scrapped. Another amusing thing, not knowing what it was, they had the 2300 pound base for the Seldemayr Merry Go Round cut up and hauled away with the nasty old scrap iron.

FACT #25: Do not see where the third and last building needed under the Miller and McKennon plans can ever be secured or built. It was to house the train unloading exhibit and diorama. Would also have housed not less than thirty booths for the Display of the Hall of Fame of Circuses. CFA, CHS and CMB groups bearing the names of the shows would have been invited to contribute materials and labor in building these exhibits. Silly dream, I guess.

FACT #26: Marian and I, after spending over sixty thousand dollars of our own funds, devoting almost twenty thousand hours of our time, traveling many thousands of miles looking for circus artifacts for the museum and touting it world wide now feel sad and unhappy with what has happened with our "baby" we spent over fifteen years nurturing and developing.

America's Foremost Authority on Tented Attractions
A MAN WHO WAS THERE

Joe McKennon

Internationally known circus and carnival trouper
historian and lecturer

139 S. WASHINGTON DR.
SARASOTA, FLORIDA
33577

CIRCUS LOVERS EVERYWHERE

This a very difficult letter to write, but write it I must. Like many of you I was born "circus struck." All my games were circus, and I never intended to ever do anything but circus when I grew up. A couple of early attempts at joining out with shows were nipped in the bud by my parents coming and getting me, but at the age of nineteen (with a good trade under my belt) I was with the American Circus Corporation as a boss on one of their great shows. From then on I did about what I wanted to do, or went some place where I could.

I, like all other circus troupers, looked upon the big tented shows as living organisms and we were willing parts of the whole. These were organizations where logistical miracles were performed as a matter of course. Many of us never liked to work for Ringling Barnum, but we all looked up to her and were secretly proud of her greatness. Traveling on four trains of up to one hundred eight railroad cars, carrying a hundred and forty four huge wagons using as many as three hundred fifty big baggage horses, feeding up to fourteen hundred of her employees in her cook houses three meals a day, giving two performances a day to up to twenty eight thousand circus goers, using up to four hundred circus performers in these three ring and four stage performances (Seven Rings), tearing down moving and setting up this magic empire each day with railroad jumps of fifty to one hundred fifty miles per day—to any person who had not traveled with one for at least two seasons, it was bewildering and almost incomprehensible; but we all understood it, and loved it. Then in 1956 the much cut down Ringling Barnum Circus deserted its tents and the curtain went down on the last one of our loves.

In the sixties when Mel Miller, another "Circus Simple" person, announced that he, with the aid of a circus minded Board of Trustees, was going to keep much of this circus magic at the Ringling Museum of the Circus, I was happy to join him in a project that would preserve, depict and keep alive memories of just what the old rail transported circus really was. I joined with him, at no salary, in restoring and creating a "Back Yard Scene" that was accurate to the last little detail, even to the Belvedere Hotel towel on the clothes line outside the women's dressing room. Mel had made full sets of plans for this huge industrial museum (never an art museum) for our long gone sector of the industry. These plans were all OK'ed by the members of the Board. I was really happy in helping do a job that would keep alive the memories of my love as she really had been.

It was one fly in the soup, the fledgling Circus Museum, as it really made quite a lot of money for the complex. YES. IT GENERATED THIRTY FIVE PERCENT OF ALL THE ADMISSION MONIES FOR THE COMPLEX, AND WAS BEING RUN BY ONLY FOUR PEOPLE ON THE PAYROLL. Such things are heresy to art museum oriented persons who have been nurtured all their days on grants from individuals and tax payers funds. Unfortunately for the Circus Museum, the day to day life of the operation was run at the whim and fancy of the Directors of the complex, whose qualifications are a Masters degree in Art. In spite of this we stayed and got the Back Yard open fully.

When Mel Miller left in 1968 to work for Judge Roy Hofheinz, major owner of the new Ringling Barnum Circus, I stayed on. With some revisions of his plans I got the THEN members of the board to get the next building of the Circus Complex, the present main building. This building was planned to house the Side Show Front and to plan vistas giving the illusion of distance so vital to depicting the old time circus as it really was. The new director gave much lip service but the project was hindered quite a lot. We did get it open and the complex now had five of the nine vistas I had envisioned for the museum when the third and final building was built and exhibits set.

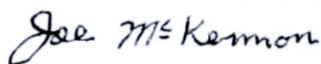
In my fifteen years with the Museum of the Circus, Mrs. McKennon and I put in not less than twenty thousand hours of volunteer labor for the complex. This in addition to expenditure of over sixty thousand dollars of our cash and thousands of miles of uncompensated travel to wheel factories, etc. etc. getting artifacts and parts needed. I also gave up my work in the Scottish Rite of Asheville, N.C. where I was in line for the highest honors as I had been the Master of the Work with twenty three degree teams for twelve years when I resigned to come to Florida full time. I was happy to do this as I was creating displays that would preserve and demonstrate the old time circus as it really was. As pressures mounted from people who probably couldn't distinguish between a "bale ring" and a "bull ring" who tried to "upgrade" the circus museum along paths completely foreign to a circus, I finally had to give up and quit.

The back yard scene is now closed down with its wagon wheel tracks and horse show prints all covered over with nice clean concrete. Rumor has it that there are plans afoot to dismember the Side Show Front. No chance now of getting the third big building with the other Industry Exhibits already in shambles. SURE, I AM UNHAPPY. WHY SHOULD I NOT BE?

This letter has been triggered by a SHORT telephone conversation with one of the PRESENT members of the board. He implied that I should not be too disgruntled, "after all, I had enjoyed my work at the Museum." NO PERSON WHO HAS PUT IN OVER FIFTEEN YEARS PLANNING AND WORKING TO CREATE A PROJECT CAN POSSIBLY BE HAPPY IN THE DESTRUCTION OF HIS PROJECT.

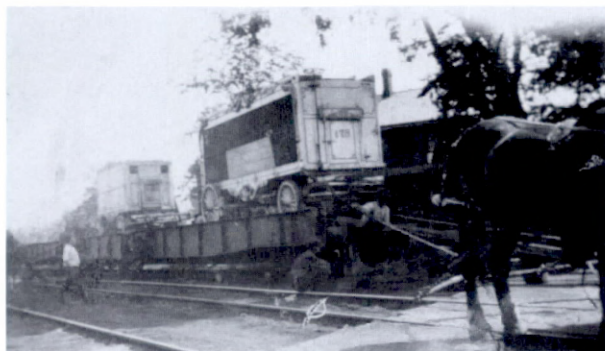
I wouldn't be so unhappy if there was one literate person in America capable of recreating those displays. There ain't. They are all dead like Mel Miller. The crop of "Know Nothings about railroad circus operations" just can not do the job envisioned by Mel Miller and me.

Sincerely,



Joe McKennon

P.S. Don't believe me about the circus displays. But, I can get many sworn statements from people all over the United States, and some from European Showmen, that those exhibits were only ones like them in the world and were by far the best circus exhibits anywhere.



Al G. Barnes cages being unloaded from flat cars, season of 1923. Lead cars in No. 178. Note the wagon is decorated with carvings from the former steam calliope (last used in 1921) as well as some from the ex Forepaugh-Sells tab-den which had female corner statues. Bill Elbirn Collection.

Kinko, and Phil King. A photo of these clowns appeared in *Billboard* of 5 May. There were seventeen clowns in the picture.

That the "Governor" did not always ride Tusko in the tournament was evident from a message from Rex de Roscelli from Las Vegas, Nevada, on 4 May. He wired: "I am pleased to inform *Billboard* that Al G. Barnes, circus magnate, has this day won in the Las Vegas courts his decree of divorce from Sarah Jane Barnes." With this action behind him, the proprietor left at once to join his circus in Ohio.

The Barnes' show made a big impression on the people of Middletown, Ohio, on 1 May. The weather was perfect, the parade made a big impact, and the matinee attendance was good and the night house packed. Dan McAvoy, clown, was ill and confined to the Miami Hospital in Dayton, Ohio, on 2 May. He rejoined the show in Detroit. Tiffin, Ohio brought in big crowds to both shows, but in Detroit the show encountered much rain, Pontiac, Michigan, following the two-day Detroit stand, was cancelled because of the weather.

The show was well billed for Grand Rapids, Michigan, but there was plenty of Ringling-Barnum and Hagenbeck-Wallace paper posted also. Barnes' scheduled date was 25 May and the Corporation show was due on 14 June. The Big One made the area in early June and again in early July.

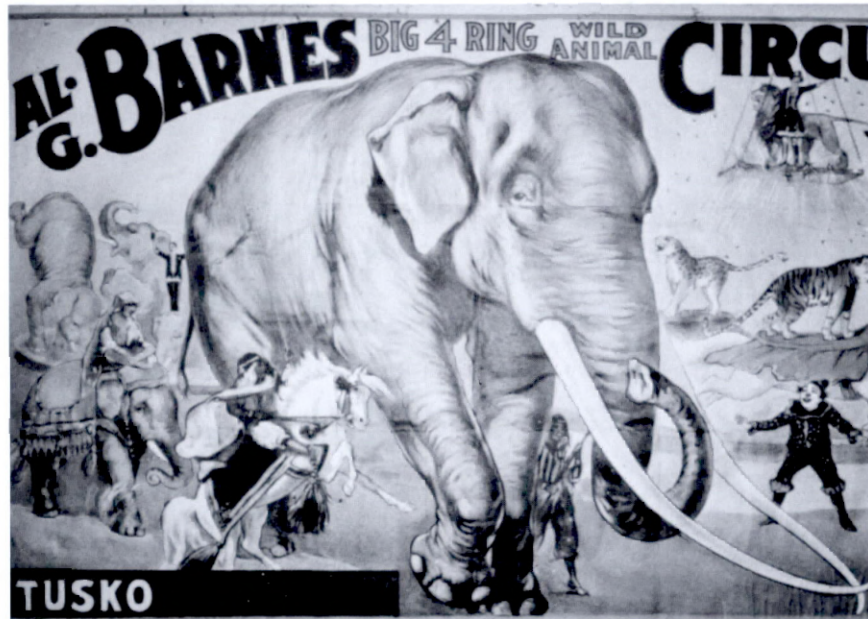
During the first week in June a report from the Barnes' Circus indicated a number of poor days at the end of May. Three members of the circus had died (details unknown); a great deal of trouble had been experienced obtaining workmen; one of the polar bears had died during the parade at Flint; and a resident of that city, reported dead from the kick of a performing horse while sitting at the ringside, was recovering in the local hospital. In addition to all of this, Lottie Le Claire, the prima donna,

broke a limb as the result of a fall during the Detroit engagement.

In contrast to the above report, came one from "Skinny" Dawson who stated that the Barnes' show was doing the best business of its history. He mentioned that the circus gave two performances one night in Detroit in heavy rain and that at Flint more than fifteen hundred people were turned away at the night show. Of more import it was acknowledged that Ben Austin had taken over the job of manager from Harley Tyler.

After two weeks in Michigan the Barnes' show moved into Indiana and then to Ohio. At Sandusky, on 5 June, there were two packed houses. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus was immediately behind the Barnes' circus for several Michigan dates but was routed

Al G. Barnes poster advertising Tusko was used in the 1920's. Color scheme had the title in red with other lettering at the top in blue. Bottom lettering is in white and blue on a red background. Various animals are in their natural colors with the overall background ranging from medium blue to light tan. The original poster is in the Albert Conover Collection.



Rare photo of the Al G. Barnes No. 1 advertising car, season of 1923. Bill Elbirn Collection.

into Indiana, Illinois and Iowa after its last Michigan stand on 15 June.

The day following the fine Sandusky date a near panic occurred on the show at Elyria, Ohio. According to the report there were two thousand patrons under the big top when a cloud-burst struck the show during the matinee performance. Tons of water falling on the canvas threatened to wreck the tents and the show officials ordered the crowd to evacuate. A serious stampede was averted by a detail of police on the grounds. The horse top did collapse and the circus employees were forced to devote their attention to rescuing the animals.

After this near disaster the Barnes' show continued east and played Erie, Pennsylvania, and then Dunkirk, Geneva, and Utica in New York State. There was a late arrival in Utica on 12 June and the parade was delayed for three hours. Some time was made up but both performances were late in starting. The show had played to good business in Geneva the day before but one of its employees was found lying



Three Oval Mirror Tableau with the No. 2 big show band in the Al G. Barnes street parade, season of 1923. Toby Tyler photo in the Pfening Archives.

across the main track of the New York Central Railroad in an unconscious condition. He had been rather severely injured and the problem delayed the train's arrival in Utica.

Another problem was encountered at Albany, New York, the date following the Utica stand. After the show arrived it was learned that the grounds that had been leased were unavailable. After some delay Hoffman Park was obtained and this forced a long haul of the equipment and the cancellation of the parade. The afternoon performance did not start until three o'clock. As a result the matinee played to very poor attendance. The night show was capacity however. While moving off the lot that night a trolley car smashed into a circus wagon and this delayed the journey to Amsterdam. In that city John Aasen was treated at the hospital but continued with the show to Troy where a doctor confined him in that city's hospital. But again, bad luck was encountered during the night movement from the lot. An employee fell under a wagon and had both legs crushed. This delayed the circus and it did not reach Poughkeepsie until late the next morning. Again the parade was abandoned, despite the crowds lining the streets, and the matinee was considerably late.

An additional tragedy occurred after the show left Albany—the next day the body of Harold Walker, a Barnes' employee, was found on the railroad tracks near Frankfort, N.Y. It was assumed that he had fallen from the circus train as it made its run to Albany. In addition to this, in Amsterdam, William M. Nelson, driving a four-horse hitch on the seal wagon, had a runaway when the team had a collision with a trolley car. Nelson was slightly injured but the seals were unhurt. This meant there had been two collisions with trolley cars in two days.

At Chester, Pennsylvania, the afternoon show fell far short of the expected

gate, but the night performance was large enough to compensate for the low attendance. The show had made a Sunday run from Poughkeepsie which got it into town in time to avoid another late performance. From that town it entered the metropolitan area with dates at Burlington, Asbury Park, Elizabeth, Jersey City and Paterson. The wild animal show from Palms, California, had never been in this district before, and in spite of adverse conditions because of labor troubles and transportation difficulties, and an unusual number of minor mishaps, the show won approval from the inhabitants.

The sight of the famous Tusko with Al G. Barnes on his back brought salvos of approval at each performance. While neither had been seen in this district before they were easily recognized and tribute was paid as it should have been. Lottie Le Claire was working again even though she sported a cast. The train arrived in Jersey City at noon and too late to parade. This was unfortunate for the town folk since it always displayed a magnificent spectacle of vehicles, mounted riders, and open dens of wild animals. The delay in leaving Elizabeth was caused by the engine severely bumping the cars and it was necessary

Al G. Barnes elephant herd in parade, season of 1923. The giant Tusko is in the lead. Joe Bradbury Collection.



Elephant Tableau (No. 181) with the clown band in the 1923 Al G. Barnes street parade. Toby Tyler photo in the Pfening Archives.

to recheck all the wagons and cages.

The reviewer was on the Jersey City lot at nine o'clock but was unable to make any notes until noon. As soon as the steward, Mit Carl; the chef, Slim Dodd, and his assistant, William Harvey, could prepare a meal—either breakfast or dinner depending on the viewpoint, the writer was seated with Lottie Le Claire, Shirley King of the "Rain" company, and Celia B. Cassidy (sister of Frank Cassidy), and Bert Dennis and his wife and son.

After the meal the correspondent was guided by "Skinny" Dawson to meet those of the personnel not actually engaged in the construction of the circus city. He was introduced to many people several of whom have already been mentioned in this article. Among them were: Major Robert Thornton, Louis and Nellie Roth, Nelson Lausten (supt. of tickets), Louis Ingelheim (head usher), Edith and Henry Hackman, Charles Cook (general supt.), R. B. Farman (big show ticket wagon), Billie Moore, the Australian Kangaroosters, Charles Hoyt (down-town ticket wagon), Mel Penneck, Paul Barton (train master), and his assistant, "Stubby" Ross, "Shorty" Reece, Wilfred Korpi, J. W.

Prinz, treasurer, John Wacksmith (novelties), Frank Rooney (boss hostler), Red McKay, elephant supt., E. E. Edwards, down-town tickets, T. G. McNeeley, front-door tickets and office, Merritt Belew (principal horse trainer), Fred Leslie, John R. Fowler, Wm. K. Peck (front door), and D. L. Massey, (concessions). It should be noted that several of the above men were new to their positions that year.

The correspondent then visited "Candy" Shelton's No. 1 Side Show. The personnel in this department were the same as listed earlier with the exception of Sig. Arcaris, impalement act, who had joined since the Kentucky dates. He also mentioned in his report Mabel Davenport and Minnie Watts, singers with Prof. A. A. Wright's band. The reviewer also noted Mr. and Mrs. Gustave Shaffrath, the world's smallest married couple, who had a platform to themselves. On the center platform were Fritz Zecker, Paul Hasse, Agnes Frederick, Mae Hatcher, Sophie Frederick, Fredman Fogschiss, Ida and William Shaffrath. These tiny folk comprised the Klinkhardt Troupe.

His visit to the No. 2 annex (pit show) revealed the same attractions as recorded at Newport, Kentucky, with the exception of Chief White Cloud, fire eater, in place of Kisko. John Aasen, the Norwegian giant, had been taken ill in Troy, New York and was still confined to the hospital in that city.

A turn at the dressing rooms revealed all the performers mentioned earlier and they will not be repeated here. Jack Chase, he noted, had been bitten by a monkey and was not working. The report of the menagerie gave an idea of the many species of animals which were displayed around the country by the Barnes' Show. He reported a total of twenty-six species with these given special mention: elephants, camels, tigers, lions, pumas, leopards, zebras, monkeys, polar and brown bears, a yak, buffalo, pigs, chickens, rabbits, raccoons, mules, seals, llamas, and several types of dogs. He also mentioned eagles and pigeons but did not include Lotus in his list.

In conclusion, the correspondent en-



Closeup of the Elephant Tableau with the clown band in the 1923 Al G. Barnes street parade. Toby Tyler photo in the Pfening Archives.

joyed the performance but only commented on the spec, "Alice in Wonderland" with Lottie Le Claire's vocalizing and the Liberty horse acts and the dancing horse number. In this last display he singled out the riding of Ova Thornton, Pearl Linge, Kathryn Thompson, and Rita Belew for special praise.

From the Saturday, 23 June date at Paterson, New Jersey, the Barnes' Show went into Pennsylvania for two weeks of stands. Some of the dates were at Scranton, Wilkes-Barre, Bethlehem, Pottsville, Sunbury, and Williamsport. From this last town, the show moved into Elmira and Corning, New York. Here, and especially at Auburn (the next stand) the Barnes' Circus advance men banged squarely into the brigades of the Sells-Floto Circus. "The Circus Beautiful" had played the Pennsylvania towns mentioned above in May and then made a week's stand in Brooklyn and another stand of seven days in Bos-

Al G. Barnes street parade, season of 1923. In foreground is the Rhino Tableau with No. 1 band up being pulled by a 10 horse hitch. Frank Pouska Collection.



ton. After another week in New England towns in early June the Corporation show had spent a week in Philadelphia. While the Barnes' Show was in the metropolitan area of New York, Sells-Floto was playing in Washington, D.C., and other stands to the south. It then moved rapidly north through eastern New York state and into New England again.

So with the Al G. Barnes' Circus in central New York state in mid-July, Sells-Floto had its advance departments working that area as it prepared to head west. The Barnes' Show avoided the Corporation outfit in that area for the most part by playing many more Empire State towns than Sells-Floto did. The latter skipped through to Ohio where it again competed with the west coast show. The Barnes' Circus while in New York state played such cities as Corning, Auburn, Rome, Syracuse, Oswego, Rochester, Niagara Falls, and Buffalo—in all thirteen towns.

From Buffalo the show moved to Cleveland, Ohio, for a two-day stand. Dates in Ohio, Indiana, Kentucky, West Virginia, and Pennsylvania occupied the show during the fading days of July and all of August. It was stated that the Barnes Show was playing towns which it had to pass up in April and May because of unseasonable weather and poor lots. Mansfield and Toledo both gave tremendous business and the successes continued during the Indiana and Illinois stands the following week—its 19th of the season. Additional stands in these two states filled the following week and on 11 August the show entered Kentucky.

New arrivals on the show included "Humpty" Logan who took charge of the ring stock and Walter J. Eagan who joined clown alley as a "rube". Toby Tyler joined the Arthur Berella Troupe at this time and "Fat" Roe was a new trainer of domestic animals. Frank T. Kelly joined the show in Cleveland as part of the privilege car crew.

The Barnes' Circus moved erratically into West Virginia, back to Ohio for three dates, and then returned to West Virginia and Pennsylvania during the middle part of August. It arrived in Pittsburgh for a two-day stand on the 28th and 29th of the month. Movement on the Pennsylvania Railroad caused several late arrivals in these towns because the railroad would not move a circus train faster than twenty miles per hour and with frequent stops enroute. There were many ten o'clock arrivals and parade cancellations and late matinees. Three flats were derailed on the move out of Pittsburgh with slight damage occurring to the equipment. This delay caused a very late arrival in New Brighton, Pennsylvania, the next time.

The Al G. Barnes' Circus and Sells-Floto were a week apart in their appearances at Owensboro, Kentucky, and Evansville and Vincennes, Indiana. At

Louisville, Kentucky, the Floto Show was scheduled for 20 August with the Barnes' Circus in that city on 13 August. The Corporation outfit was the third large circus of the season in Louisville; the Hagenbeck-Wallace Show having played there on 30 April. It will be recalled that Barnes and Howe's Great London had clashed in this area in 1921 and that Barnes and the John Robinson Circus had tangled in this region in 1922.

The circus from California arrived in Salem, Ohio, shortly before noon and didn't unload the first wagon until after twelve o'clock. The afternoon show opened at three o'clock. Officials of the circus stated that this was probably a record for the season after such a late arrival. Of course, the parade was again cancelled. The matinee attendance was only fair but there was a capacity crowd at night. A *Billboard* representative visited at this location and picked up some comments from "the governor."

"A much larger, better equipped show with new innovations and novelties will go out next spring," stated Al G. Barnes. "The new spectacle will startle the world," he added, and also reported that the circus would definitely winter in Palms, California. He also commented that the show was forced to spend the last winter at Love Field because of the railroad strikes occurring at that time.

"Business has been wonderful and, in territory where the show is known, capacity business and turnaways are frequent," Barnes stated. "For instance at Pittsburgh it rained both days but business was big." He did not mention the frequent delays, the many accidents, the cancelled parades, and late matinees, of course.

Opposition continued to plague the circus at the beginning of September. This time it was the Gentry-Patterson show. Barnes' officials gave as the reason for the innumerable jumps into other states from Ohio the fact that the Barnes' Show was trying to keep away from other circuses close at hand. For example, when the John Robinson Circus scheduled Piqua, Ohio, for 3 September it was at least the fifth time that the show had been in the state that season. The Hagenbeck-Wallace Circus was out of the way having toured as far west as Utah in early August, but the Sells-Floto Show was still in the vicinity by the first of September.

At Taylorsville, Ill., the Gentry-Patterson Circus posted some three thousand sheets while the Barnes' Circus did a little better with nearly 3,100 lithographs. As a result the Patterson outfit played the packed houses, despite rain, on 1 September. On the 12th, the Barnes' show arrived at eight in the morning having left the previous day's lot at Olney in a heavy downpour. It had big business in the afternoon at Taylorsville and a packed house at night.



Al G. Barnes clown group in front of a cage, season of 1923. Frank Pouska Collection.

John Aason had returned and was anticipating the film, "Why Worry" at St. Louis. He had worked in the film with its star, Harold Lloyd. Pete Staunton of the side-show had closed and Eddie Reece took his place as lecturer. Ralph A. Fisher, former clown with Campbell Bros. Circus joined as side-show ticket seller. Delno Fritz, and his niece, Edna Price, sword swallows and fire eaters, joined the side-show. They had been with Al G. Barnes in 1913 through 1916. T. F. Everett took Jacob Jacobson's place in charge of privileges. The latter remained on the show to sell balloons. H. H. Franklin, formerly with the Gentry Show, came on as auditor.

From Taylorsville the Barnes' Show moved to Staunton and then into St. Louis, Mo., for a three-day stand on September 14-16. The following week the circus played Kansas and Oklahoma towns to capacity business. In contrast to the experiences in the Eastern states the circus did not miss a parade or a stand for a month. However, on Friday, 12 October, in Frederick, Oklahoma, a terrific rainstorm engulfed the show. It was unable to leave the lot in that city until noon on Saturday. It arrived in Wichita Falls, Texas, at 4:30 in the afternoon to find that lot under water also. The show did not unload but continued its run to Stamford. A report from the show stated that this was the first lost stand since 9 May when snow was encountered at Massillon, Ohio. However, as noted, there were many late arrivals during the intervening months.

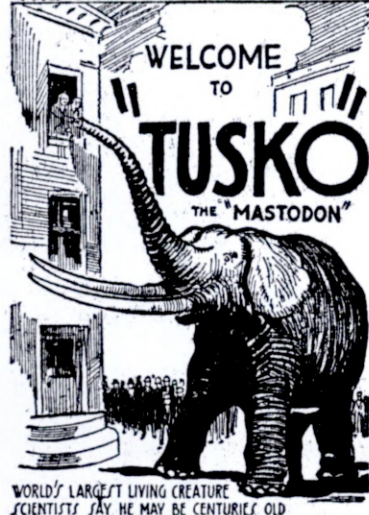
Two weeks and three days of towns in

Tusko was featured in this newspaper ad used for the August 4, 1923 stand in Decatur, Illinois. Circus World Museum Collection.

DECATUR
ONE DAY ONLY
SATURDAY, 4
AUGUST

AL. BARNES
WORLD'S ONLY 4-RING
WILD ANIMAL
CIRCUS

THE SHOW THAT'S DIFFERENT!



'ALICE IN JUNGLELAND'
A GORGEOUS EXTRAVAGANZA
1200 ANIMALS 1080 PEOPLE
— 550 HORSES —

the Lone Star State occupied the circus employees until 31 October and then the show entered New Mexico for dates at Roswell, Clovis, and Albuquerque. On Sunday, 4 November, it made the run into El Paso, Texas, and then picked up Deming, New Mexico, on its route to Arizona. After five stands in that state the show entered California at El Centre. It played another two weeks in the Golden State and concluded its tour at Paso Robles on 24 November.

In Pasadena, on 17 November, the local paper featured several photographs of the show—among them Al G. Barnes with a reindeer and baby and the Kangaroosters riding ostriches. In describing the parade the paper commented: "Shortly after eleven o'clock came the long parade through the crowded business section of the city in which the thrilling pageant passed in grand review. Great cages of wild animals, the tintinabulations of two great calliopes, and the merry tunes of the larger bands, the passing of hundreds of handsome horses, are but a few of the interesting things to be seen and heard. There was only one feature missing, and that was Tusko, the largest elephant in the world, who on account of his massive proportions, could not be taken down the city streets. He was seen, however, at the menagerie."

A report from Palms, Barnes Circus City, on 30 November, stated that Barnes had appointed J. B. Austin as general agent and Charles C. Cook as manager for the 1924 season. Austin, who finished the tour of 1923 as manager, had formerly been with the Gentry Bros. Circus. Charles Cook had served Barnes for eighteen years in various capacities.

Additional news from quarters reported that Barnes and Harley Tyler had been touring in California and searching for alfalfa pasture for the show's horses. Unfortunately they decided to locate them on a ranch in San Luis Obispo County—the error of which was apparent the following spring. Louis Roth was planning an act of eighteen lions for 1924 and word had it that



Tusko became so unruly he had to be kept in this enclosure constructed of railroad iron at the Al G. Barnes winterquarters in Palms, California following the 1923

all his cat trainers would be women. The winter activities of various show people were listed—many of them remaining in the area; others trouping in vaudeville.

On 22 December it was reported that more than 80,000 people had visited the Barnes' zoo since the show had returned to quarters. This report also stated that Barnes had recently refused an offer for one million dollars for the zoo site. The original cost of the tract five years earlier was \$79,000 the article stated. Also mentioned was the imminent arrival of a shipment, valued at \$350,000, of wild animals from Singapore. The ship was scheduled to dock in San Francisco.

The 1923 route book was a large (9 × 12 inch) compilation of twelve pages produced by Thomas "Skinny" Dawson. It was liberally illustrated with sixty photographs and included the names of the people in all departments of the show. Three of the best photos featured Tusko and in none of them was the gigantic beast burdened with the mass of chains seen in later years. The show had toured for thirty-five weeks

season. The huge beast did not go on the road for the 1924 through 1926 seasons but did again tour in 1927. Frank Pouska Collection.

and played in some 200 cities. It made one three-day stands at Dallas, and two two-day stands at Detroit and Cleveland. All the others occupied one day. The show traveled a total of 14,551 miles. It had several long hauls of over 200 miles usually made on a Sunday.

Probably the longest movements for a week occurred in Texas and New Mexico during the last days of October and the first few days of November. On Sunday, 28 October, the show moved 204 miles from Snyder, Texas, to Amarillo. The next day it ran only 74 miles to Plainview. Then, on Tuesday night, it moved 121 miles to Lubbeck for a matinee only. The next night involved a run of 208 miles to Roswell, New Mexico. The Thursday night haul was over 102 miles to Clovis for another afternoon only performance. The show then moved 270 miles to Albuquerque for the Saturday stand and then jumped another 270 miles back to El Paso for the Monday date. The 1923 tour had apparently been successful financially but surely involved a real heartache with railroad movements, injuries, and poor weather conditions.

UNCLE GUS AND THE CIRCUS

A NEW BOOK about OLD CIRCUSES! The circus activities of Augustine Conant from 1850 to 1871. Based on old papers and journals found in the Conant farmhouse in Acton, Massachusetts plus five years research in old New England newspapers. An old deed that lists circus properties; number of jacks and stringers; wagons, their use and number of horses for each; even names of the ring horses; &c. &c. Journals that list expenses for lots, licenses, salaries, billboards, hotel bills, I.R.S. taxes, sawdust, wagon repairs, &c.&c. The Great Australian Circus of 1870, early RR show.

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YOU COULD LEAP TO YOUR DEATH

By Ernie Millette

Ernie Millette sent this manuscript to the Bandwagon a few years before his death in 1983 at age 100. He was a noted leaper and gymnast on circuses, starting on Sells Bros. in 1895, and left the business while still a young man as the result of an injury. His memoirs, The Circus That Was, were published in 1971.

Although the name "triple somersault springboard leap" means nothing to the general public today, this was not always the case. Sixty years ago the leaps held circus audiences breathless because they were so difficult. As a matter of fact, if any performer revives this triple and lives to tell about it, he'll earn fame throughout the circus world. There ought to be a big parade in his honor. At the very least, he should rate a statue.

Few audiences of today realize how old the entertainment of performing leaps is: According to some historians it goes all the way back to the ancient cavemen, who entertained each other via their own version of leaps, hand stands and tumbling.

The early Egyptians also leaped for fun. They consisted of traveling troupes who wadded their way along the Nile River and put on shows whenever they could. There were also professional leaping entertainers who diverted the Persians, the Hindus and the Chinese. Although the Greeks and the Romans are particularly famous to us for their intellectual activities, they should also be remembered as high quality leapers.

It is well known that the youth, even young girls, leaped over wild bulls, circus fashion, on the island of Crete in the Mediterranean, and crowds of spectators watched breathlessly. The bull advanced. The courageous young persons met the beast, and took it by the horns. They deftly somersaulted over the snorting, enraged beast. All this took place over 4,000 years ago. Leaping, Cretian style, with the assistance of bulls, wasn't the only dangerous version. It was always a daredevil activity.

It was called the Death Leap in Italy, because so many deaths resulted from it there. Many other tragic pages can be found in circus history because of it. Reportedly the man who invented the springboard, one Tompkinson, was also the first circus performer to execute a double on the ground. The place was Edinburgh and the date was 1835. The

sensation was tremendous—but he paid with his life.

Doubles and triples can occur generally in these areas:

1. Flying trapeze (into a net or caught in a grip).
2. Trampoline and teeterboard.
3. Springboard diving (water).
4. Pure acrobatics, on mat, on shoulders; and (singles) on horse back.
5. Leaping from the high leaping-board over animals to a large tick.

This discussion concerns itself mainly with the latter.

The early American circus had its own leaping tournament. It was pleasing and exciting; but the specialty is missing from today's big shows. It consisted of a lineup of from 30 to 40 superb athletes who were lively and spectacular. They performed many acts including acrobatic riding, and aerialist numbers. There were also some top flight double somersault leapers and a score who did singles.

I will always remember my own thrill of sailing through space in a leap of my own while the drums of the circus I was with rolled below. The whole routine was simple; I ran down a ramp, hit the aerial leaping-board with both feet, and then I thrust myself into space over a herd of animals—circus horses, camels

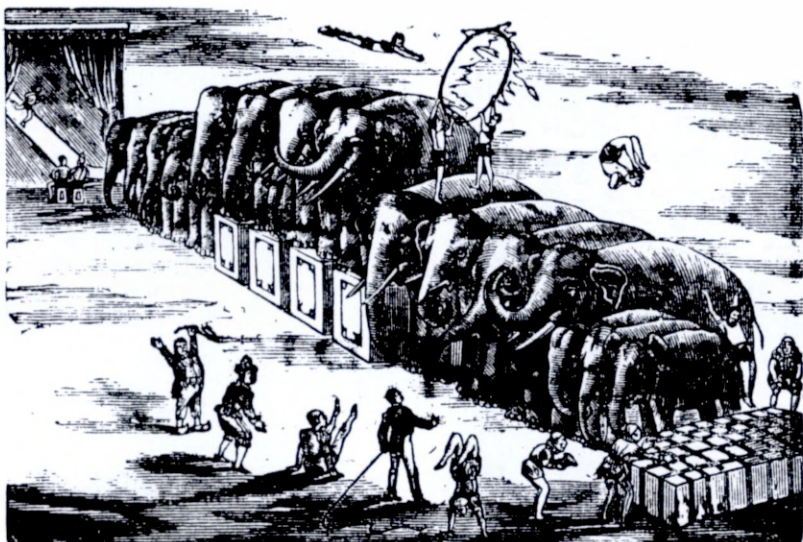
or elephants. That's all there was to it—if I landed on a mat that was placed on the other side of the herd for me! To make matters more interesting (to the audience, anyway) the mat was moved outward as the distance of the leap was increased.

But leaping wasn't all excitement and applause. Even when a performer soared blithely over the herd and landed on the far side, his body could take a beating. For some of us the shock on knee joints and the pounding on swollen ankles was severe. There was also the much greater danger from missing the landing tick. This resulted in shattered bones, and was a penalty which the performer paid when the tick was placed too close or too far away. Even when the tick was safely hit, the rebound which the performer experienced was often far from being a pleasant sensation. These were some of the very good reasons why some gymnasts refused, point blank, to perform leaps. Either they would very politely maintain that they simply did not know how, or they'd suddenly fake a temporary malady. The Charlie Horse was popular.

Leaping equipment was primitive. It included a running ramp, a spring board, an elephant tub and springy cross bar. The running ramp was approximately 18 inches wide and ran from a height of 16 feet. The spring board was made of hickory. It was seven feet long, and one end rested on the elephant tub. The other was placed on the

Ringling Bros. leapers in 1898. Champion Chad Werts in black tights in back row. In 1897 the Ringlings paid the Millette brothers \$85.00 a week salary. All illustrations from Pfening Archives.





ash or hickory cross bar which was suspended on two cushioned jacks. Each jack had a property man who sat upon it and acted as a spring board stabilizer.

The tick or landing mat was anything but a bed of roses. It was filled with straw to cushion the landing, but this filling wasn't guaranteed. I can recall the time when there was a scarcity of hay, grain and feed on the market. So for reasons of economy, the tick was only filled half full. Another source of pain (and sometimes real danger) was seasonal. It occurred in the spring, when the new hickory spring boards were still unseasoned, and had no spring. They were stiff and dead, and had no "give."

The only silver lining in the whole grey cloud of danger was actually the presence of a "catcher", who was stationed on guard at the landing tick. He was usually an alert veteran associate gymnast who protected the leaper by helping to prevent him from missing the tick. He was ready for an emergency rebound from the tick. This man wasn't always present, however, and when a

Leaping was a great feature in late nineteenth centuries circuses as shown in Barnum and London herald from the 1880s.

performer did a double somersault leap, he often had to work all by himself. There was no one at the tick end of the line to assist him and control his fall. He had to land there all by himself. How difficult this was is illustrated by the sudden and violent ends of many popular performers.

Fred O'Brien in his double missed the tick and was killed in 1877. Within a score of years Bob Hanlon, Arthur Morning, William Kinkead and Harry Costella broke their necks and died doing doubles. They all belong in the Circus Hall of Fame, but are unfortunately almost unknown today.

The famous-in-his-day, Gus Werner, died this way too, and I especially re-

Forepaugh-Sells leapers in 1899. The act was called the 7 Millette brothers. The great Albert Howe is shown in the center.



member him because he was an old friend of mine. He came from my own home town gym, and was one of the National Turners of Newark, N.J. His tragedy occurred at the spring opening in Madison Square Garden on the Barnum and Bailey Show, and the story was written up in the *New York Herald*. We read the story and entered the ring with what looked like happy smiles on our faces. This was a very real version of the old "laugh clown laugh" variety, because the audience couldn't see the cold sweat on our bodies—or hear the throbbing of our hearts.

The *Herald* reported: "August Werner was doing doubles over the elephants. He narrowly escaped injuring himself for life. He missed his calculation and landed on his neck." After two days in the New York Hospital, the report went on, "He whispered to the surgeon—I tried to do the triple and I lost control!"

But not every double somersault performer was unfortunate, and to the last, one the great ones to do the high up and long distance somersaults successfully in the leaps was one of our partners, the great Albert Howe. It was a funny thing about Howe, he had a permanent kink in his neck from a leaping injury that caused him to carry his head tilted to the left as shown in his photos. But you'd never know this from his precision in revolutions. We both worked together in the leaps on both the Ringling and Forepaugh shows and he was the principal leaper for several years, and deserved this distinction. Once he started down the ramp as the drums rolled and throbbed, he never balked or hesitated. He was never distracted by the restless movement of the line of elephants over which he was about to leap. His performance was remarkable. He gave the impression of reckless abandon as he casually sauntered down the ramp for a few paces. He then suddenly approached the spring board with the speed of a deer. He hit it with ferocious force. He soared high up, tucked himself neatly into a ball, revolved twice with stunning speed and with a perfect sense of direction and location. Then he let himself out full length—and landed on the tick with unfailing calculation.

You can be sure that we waited breathlessly to see how he would come out at the other end beyond the elephants. We always found that he'd finished like an Adonis. Tall, on his toes, head high, chest out, and arms extended to salute the cheers of the multitude.

My own performance in the leaps didn't come up to this, but I took considerable pride in it—and unlike many others, I am still here to tell the tale. Sample press notices in principal U.S. cities and abroad read: "Millettes' specialty of doubles is a challenge—executed with dash and daring—is the talk



Strobridge produced this litho of the leaps over elephants for the Barnum show in the 1880s. Pfening Archives.

of the leading gymnastic clubs in the country—audiences sit in stone silence, then burst into applause by sheer merit at these startling feats not ever attempted by any athletes."

My specialty was the double somersault, which I performed together with Howe and my other team mates. We did them backward as well as forward and from shoulder-to-shoulder, and this record has yet to be duplicated. I performed these feats by the thousands for years on both Forepaugh-Sells (1899-1900) and Ringling (1897-1898). True, I had my own share of hard knocks, bruises and broken bones, but I was one of the lucky ones. I came out of them in one piece for a pretty long period of time. I did triples also—but I was sensible enough to have the mechanic or safety belt ready.

Leaping and somersaulting work requires a very exacting technique. With somersaults, the trick is to get hold of your tuck properly, grab your knees and pull them against your chest. This requires a very nice calculation. If you're too anxious to turn over, you tuck up too soon and you *fall heavy*—like a sack of oats. If you're late in getting into your revolution, you get stalled or "cast" like a human wheel at dead center. In either case there's only one remedy—send for an ambulance right away.

Sight is of the utmost importance for the catcher who has to catch another performer on his shoulders or in his grip. 20-20 vision is vital to spot the catapulting performer who is hurling at him.

The top mounter or flyer too needs something more than 20-20. He has to be able to feel or sense just where he is at every point in his revolution.

In the double forwards he can't always see the exact spot where he intends to land, until his body has finished whirling over in the air. Part of

his body and his knees are in his line of vision and prevent him from seeing where he will land. All he can do is try to glance through his knees to guide himself or steal sideways glances. But even the best vision isn't enough to protect the performer, because as he travels through the air with the traditional "greatest of ease" and gets beyond the second revolution, it's common for him to actually lose track of where he is. He's like a ship without a rudder in a very stormy sea. He's really lost, and what good is his sight to him? Now what if he holds on too long or lets out too soon for a safe landing? Sometimes the best bet is to simply hold the breath count to three and pray and hope!

Yet despite these very real handicaps, there are a few gifted humans who have that super fine something which gives them the skill to go through *three* revolutions without losing orientation! They arrive at their target and finish correctly! The only woman in this aristocratic circle is Antoinette Concello. She described one very breath-taking performance of her flying trapeze number:

Billy Pape was featured with elephant leaps on Downie Bros. Circus in the early 1930s. Pape is shown doing a somersault over three elephants. Eddie Jackson photo.



The Forepaugh-Sells show featured elephant leaps in this poster used around 1898. Pfening Archives.

"I lost track of where I was after the second turn—you always do—but I counted three and came out of my tuck, and then I felt Eddie's (Ward) hands smacking into my wrists. Another tenth of a second and I'd have snapped over, my face in the net."

In regard to springboard leaps, it's almost impossible to do this kind of thing successfully when leaping over elephants in a triple. The performer is quietly carried out of the ring and survives for a period of from one to three days. Here's what usually happens: He alights on the tick alright, but he gets there head first—and this is instant death in 99 cases out of 100. Even alighting on the head in a net results in a job for the coroner. Many really good gymnasts met tragic ends in just this way.

In 1856 an American, John Aymar, tried it on the Isle of Wight. He landed on his forehead and broke his neck. George Miller did the triple successfully twice in practice, but when he made his first public demonstration in 1856 he landed on his head on the tick and was killed.



The Downie show used this Erie lithograph to advertise the leaping act. Pfening Archives.

There were three successful performers who achieved the triple from the running ramp and leaping-board. Abe Johnson, who over-turned on the double, accidentally held on to his tuck. He somersaulted three times. He thanked the gods for his safe landing, but he decided that once was enough. He never tried again.

Bill Dutton turned over three times in Wilkborn, Wisconsin in 1860. But the three turns turned out to be accidental. He lost control after the second revolution, and was saved, very luckily, in a catch blanket. He realized his good luck, and also never tried again.

John Worland did the triple successfully on four different occasions on the Forepaugh show in 1881. He got away with it and lived to tell the story.

The most ironic part about all these triple tragedies is that, in a sense, they are absolutely futile. Most people in the audience simply can't distinguish even a single from a double because the movement is so fast. The difference between a $1\frac{1}{2}$ and a $2\frac{1}{2}$, can't be followed by the unpracticed eye. The dangerous triple is just a whirl in the air that isn't any different, seemingly, from the less difficult and less numerous revolutions. The speed is too great for the eye to realize exactly what has happened. So a person in the audience can very easily state emphatically, "That man turned over six or seven times," when all he saw was a garden variety double! Even many circus performers have to admit, although they hate to, that they can't always tell a double from a triple.

But audience reaction is much more exacting when it comes to other aspects of circus leaping. The biggest come-on is the danger. They "Oh" and "Ah" when the drums begin to ruffle and the symbols start to clash. Audience reaction also indicates that forward revolutions have greater beauty than backward somersaults, even though much depends on the grace of the execution. Any whirl in the air can be made into a

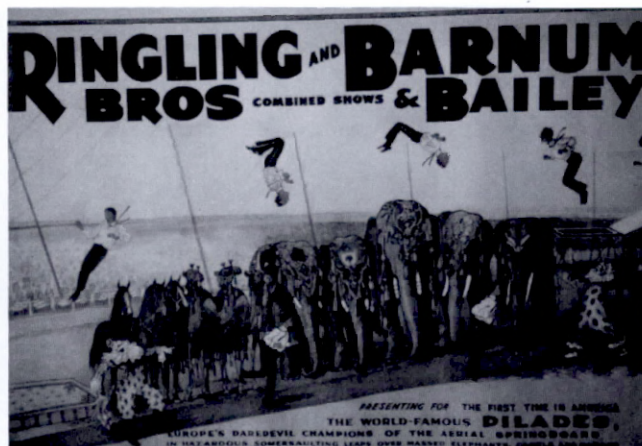
pretty sloppy mess if the acrobat is out of line and he is all elbows. He can even make it look like suicide—and that is a frightening thing to see.

Springboard leaping died out after the turn of the century and was revived again in the 1930's on Ringling, and in 1932 on Charles Sparks' Downie Brothers' Three Ring Circus. It was here that Billy Pape did a beautiful somersault over five elephants, and his act met with great acclaim. This revival was short lived, however. Nobody leaps over elephants now. I would guess that the reason is because of lack of skilled artists or an abundance of "Charlie Horses."

An interesting variation of the triple back somersault is performed with the aid of the teeterboard. The somersaulter lands in an overstuffed arm chair which is supported by the catcher. It may lack certain smoothness as it terminates in a jolt, but it is a great feat. The catcher deserves great credit for his skill in timing and judging distance.

Yet for audience excitement this

In 1958 the Cristiani cousins (Pilade) leaped over elephants on the Cristiani show. This poster was drawn by Forrest Freeland. Pfening Archives.



In 1939 the Ringling-Barnum show imported the Pilade-Cristiani troupe to perform a leaping act. This Strobridge litho was used that year. Pfening Archives.

seems tame compared with the kind of springboard leaping we knew as youngster!

Will real honest to goodness springboard leaping complete with somersaulters spinning over horses, camels and elephants with a hurrah and an alle oop ever be revived again? I hope so, because there is now a whole generation of brand new youngsters who have never known the thrill of seeing this. I personally like to sustain this hope, and I think my reasons are good. After all, we now enjoy modern technology, which means that proper springboards and adequate landing facilities can be created. But even if they aren't what does it matter? Leaping from a spring board never was an activity for the timid, and the best part of the show, for the audience, is its element of genuine danger. I hope for the best because after all, there is always a crop of upcoming, courageous and stout-hearted young bloods who desire nothing better than testing their mettle. Safer springboard leaping is one good way. Why shouldn't one of them succeed?

JOHN RINGLING NORTH 1903-1985

The man who guided the Ringling-Barnum Circus when its trains ruled the rails, and its canvas filled the sky is gone, and with his death an epoch ends. The Big One had good times and bad in the twenty-six years he controlled it from 1938 until 1967, and for good or ill, he was the most important individual in the business during the middle third of this century. He ran the biggest circus ever to exhibit in this country, and was the last railroad show "Governor." John Ringling North's death in Brussels, Belgium on 4 June recalls a larger than life personality, and a livelier, more rambunctious era of American circus.

Born in Baraboo, Wisconsin on 14 August 1903, North spent his youth around his famous uncles' circus, and, along with his family, he lived for a time in the mansion his Uncle Al built. After graduating from Baraboo High School, he attended the University of Wisconsin, and then Yale University, excelling at the latter two institutions in social rather than academic endeavors. During the roaring twenties, between stints as a Wall Street stock broker and Florida real estate salesman, he served an apprenticeship on Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey under the tutelage of his namesake John Ringling. North started out as a billposter and novelty butcher, but soon became a ticket seller, which he considered more suitable for someone of his background and attainment.

By the mid-1930s he, and his younger brother Henry, were in Sarasota assisting their Uncle John in his attempts to regain control of the Ringling-Barnum Circus. Ringling had borrowed heavily to acquire the American Circus Corporation in 1929, and in 1932, after he failed to make an interest payment on the loan, the bank brought in Samuel Gumpertz to run the show in his stead. In spite of eventually falling out with his uncle, North, with a fox's cunning, was able to gain control, if not ownership, of the Greatest Show on Earth for five years starting in 1938.

The 1938 season was the stuff of legend. North put together a tremendous show featuring Frank Buck, Terrell Jacobs, the Cristianis, the Loyal Repenskis, the Flying Concellos, the Wallendas, and a huge, acid scarred gorilla named Gargantua. The circus experienced trouble from the start. The workingmen struck at the Madison Square Garden opening, and the teamsters went out at the first under canvas stand in Brooklyn. After another teamster walk out in Toledo, Ohio, North dropped the baggage horses for a fleet of tractors, an important if controversial move in modernizing the show. Labor pains continued, however, and when wages were cut 25% as the result of bad business, the workingmen went on



A youthful North beams for the photographer in this picture taken soon after he assumed the presidency of the Ringling-Barnum organization in 1938. Pfening Archives.

strike in Scranton, Pennsylvania in late June. Unable to negotiate a settlement, North packed up his circus and sent it back to its Sarasota winterquarters. The strike and the closing were unprecedented.

He salvaged the year by sending the best Ringling-Barnum acts, including Gargantua, to the Al G. Barnes-Sells Floto Circus which he also controlled. While the show was picketed by some labor groups, the season ended in relative calm, and after the tour's end a new contract with the workingmen was agreed upon.

Subsequent seasons, if less tumultuous, saw major innovations as North implemented his ideas. Experiments in air conditioning and redesigning the big top; the use of a costume designer; the hiring of Norman Bel Geddes and John Murray Anderson to produce the show; the American debuts of Elly Ardely, Massimiliano Truzzi, and Alfred Court's cat acts; and the purchase of Madame Toto as a mate for Gargantua were highlights of his first tenure as captain of Big Bertha. Perhaps his most novel departure from the way things customarily were done under the big top was his contracting in 1942 with the great conductor Igor Stravinsky to write a piece for the bull number called the "Elephant Ballet," and hiring George Balanchine to choreograph it. Traditionalists howled, but the move got miles of press coverage and was a huge success at the box office.

The Stravinsky-Balanchine connection points out what may be North's most lasting contribution to the circus business: his belief that the performance had to change to please more sophisticated and urbane tastes. To that end, his productions were noted for their contemporary music, some of which he wrote himself, and for a themed performance which was heavy on production numbers and tied together by the wardrobe and the spec. Ringling-Barnum follows his philosophy to this day.

The years 1939-1942 also had difficult moments. In 1941, a number of the show's elephants were poisoned in Atlanta, and the next year a fire in Cleveland destroyed the menagerie. Also in 1942, the band struck and the show was forced to use canned music.

It was during this period that he developed his reputation as the colorful playboy-showman who stayed up all night, eating and drinking too much, then arising at the crack of two the next day to begin the cycle again. His saxophone playing was legendary, and he was a fixture at the M'Toto Room in Sarasota's John Ringling Hotel of which he was part owner where he held court deep into the night. In 1940 he wedded a French movie actress, his second marriage; it failed shortly thereafter, and throughout the 1940s his name appeared in gossip columns, often linked to some actress or heiress.

After the 1942 season, the Ringling widows who owned the majority of the circus stock, appointed Charles Ringling's son Robert and then James A. Haley to head the organization. In 1947 North regained control after using some fancy footwork to settle his Uncle John's estate



with the state of Florida. The 1947-1956 period saw many great new acts including Charlie Mroczkowski, the Rose Gould flyers, Albert Rix, Harold Alzana, Hugo Schmidt, Unus, Francis Brunn, Mr. Misten, and Pinto del Oro, most of whom were evidence of his outstanding ability to judge circus talent. Further modernization of the physical plant took place as a new train, composed partially of surplus army hospital cars, came into use in the late 1940s, and mechanical seat wagons were first utilized in 1948. In 1951 Cecil B. DeMille's film "The Greatest Show on Earth" was shot on the show, giving it a huge publicity windfall, to say nothing of the fees it received for allowing DeMille to film it. In 1954 the last of the claims from the terrible 1944 Hartford fire were paid off.

Things unraveled in the 1950s. First Arthur Concello, who had functioned as North's right hand ever since 1938, left the show; then Frank McCloskey, Concello's

Rudy Bundy, North, and Arthur Concello (l. to r.) review some plans during the arena era. Pfening Archives.

replacement, was forced out, taking a number of department bosses with him. The advertising and press departments underwent profound change. Michael Burke, a former CIA operative, was named general manager, and while not short in energy or enthusiasm, his lack of circus experience and pressure from organized labor eventually brought the show down in 1956. After a year and a half of late arrivals, missed performances, and low grosses, the giant aggregation ground to a halt in Pittsburgh in July 1956. It was there that North uttered the most famous one liner in circus history: "The tented circus as it exists today is, in my opinion, a thing of the past."

And so it was for Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey. During the winter of

1956-1957 Concello was brought back into the fold, and the circus was reframed as a ball park attraction, traveling mainly on trucks. It eventually became the rail transported arena show it remains today, but by the time North sold out to Roy Hofheinz and the Feld brothers in November 1967, the glory was gone.

He invested his proceeds from the sale in gold and thereby greatly enlarged his already considerable fortune. He moved to Europe, finally settling near Zurich, Switzerland, returning to America to visit friends, and for his annual physical examination at the Mayo Clinic. He caught the Ringling show during his state side visits, but never returned to his hometown of Baraboo. He followed the circus scene, and acted as a judge at the Monte Carlo Circus Festival in recent years. He had no children, but is survived by his brother Henry who lives near Zurich, and a sister Salome Wadsworth who lives near Cincinnati.

He was eighty-one when he died, but he will be forever fixed in our memory as the young dandy with the riding boots and patrician manners who was short on experience but long on brass, and who revived the Greatest Show on Earth in 1938, guiding it through the rough seas of the depression, and part of World War II. While he was heavily blamed for the failure of the show in 1956, time has clearly shown that the move away from canvas was inevitable, and that no showman, not even James A. Bailey or North's uncles, could have coped with the changing conditions of the 1950s. He represented the tail end of a glorious eighty-five year period of rail conveyed tented trouping which was, to use Robert Lewis Taylor's felicitous phrase, "the triumph of hoopla." We feel sad he is gone, and sad too that the era he symbolized no longer exists. Fred D. Pfening III



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Star Back Review

Billers, Banners and Bombast, by Charles Philip Fox and Tom Parkinson (Boulder, Colorado: Pruett Publishing Company, 1985).

Circus advertising has been too much collected and too little studied. In their third, and one certainly hopes not their last, collaboration Chappie Fox and Tom Parkinson have made a giant step toward rectifying that situation. In a format similar to their earlier work, *The Circus Moves By Rail*, they analyze the various types of show advertising, the means by which they were distributed or displayed, and what each type was meant to accomplish. The result is very informative and satisfying.

The book has many highlights, not the least of which are the illustrations. They are a delight, and one wishes more could have been in color. The wonderful pictures of lithographs, bill stands, advance cars and the like are not included to simply fill space, but in most cases to make significant points. For example, the authors note that in the less hurried nineteenth century circus posters carried more text than their twentieth century descendants, and convincingly make their case by showing an 1883 John Doris lithograph which contains about as many words as a novella.

Many "how to" photos depict lithographs being posted, and banners being tacked along with many breathtaking examples of the finished product. Others show the fabulous artwork circuses used; particularly outstanding is an amazing color reproduction of the original art for a Buffalo Bill 100 sheet juxtaposed to another Buffalo Bill poster — this one a one sheet which gives the reader a superb sense of the massiveness of multiple sheet bills. Still other pictures are historically notable such as a group of rare shots taken inside the Donaldson lithograph plant, and a number of early nineteenth century posters, handbills, and newspaper ads including an illustrated one for Ricketts in 1793. This pushes back the date of the first known pictorial newspaper ad used by a circus. Some views are just plain fun like a marvelous series of billstands of a lowly barn in Watertown, Wisconsin, or a shot of the Shelbyville, Kentucky court house decked out in Sun Brothers paper. No

circus subject lends itself to illustration better than advertising, and the authors are to be commended for their intelligent selection of pictorials. The only thing missing is a photo of an outhouse bejeweled with a Lillian Leitzel three sheet.



The text is an important contribution to our knowledge of the circus. It stands by itself, and the book would be a worthy addition to anyone's bookshelf even without pictures. Chapters on billposters, bannerman, and lithographers are terrific, and convey better than any other source the sense of what it was like to be on the advance of a large railroad circus. Other sections give a good overview of the history of different types of advertising with posters and their printers being covered in depth. While stronger for the period after 1900, the detail is still impressive, and the book stands as the best published account of the rise and fall of the American circus poster.



The volume is well written, and successfully straddles that thin line between giving the necessary background for the novice while providing new grist for the specialist's mill. The authors interviewed a number of billposters whose recollections add both flavor and detailed information. Reams of primary source material such as billposting contracts, printers' shipping lists and bills, correspondence between circuses and litho houses, and drafts of original artwork also have been put to good use.

The men who wrote the press books, newspaper ads, couriers, and heralds—

the bill writers—and the men who talked newspaper editors into running their creations—the press agents—are briefly discussed. The authors give Tody Hamilton the nod as the best bill writer ever, and bestow the press agent crown on Bev Kelley. Interesting choices both, although it could be argued that Roland Butler and Charles Day were superior bill writers. The topic of bill writing is a fascinating one, and one wishes the authors had explored it more fully.

Circus lovers are fortunate that Fox and Parkinson have chosen to write on this subject. While few *Bandwagon* readers need encouragement from this quarter to buy this volume, we nevertheless feel impelled to state that we learned a great deal from it, and enjoyed it immensely. Best of all, it made us think about old subjects in different ways, and led us to ask new questions. That may be the most valid way to judge a book, and by that measure *Billers, Banners and Bombast* passes with flying colors.

Fred D. Pfening III

The American Circus, by Wilton Eckley (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1984)

As the American circus declined, so has literary interest in the subject. Once a favorite topic of writers as diverse as Thomas Wolfe, Hamlin Garland, and William Dean Howells, the circus now rarely attracts this type of author. Happily for the circus fan and historian, Wilton Eckley, a professor of English, Fulbright lecturer, and author of numerous books and monographs on noted American authors, shares his lifelong interest in the circus in this well written book.

Eckley discusses the seventy-five years between the birth of the railroad circus in the last quarter of the nineteenth century to its demise in 1956. "That circus, for better or for worse, is gone—living only in the memories of those who knew it or in the imaginations of those who did not," Eckley admits that, "All things are temporal is a truism that frequently offers little consolation when a beloved tradition or institution passes away or changes into something noticeably different. Though

some may find it unpleasant to contemplate, the American circus had undergone such a change."

Although Eckley explains that the circus has always been an organization in flux, its most recent accommodations, along with the changes in modern society, have robbed the circus of its ability to arouse the imagination for weeks before its arrival. It could turn an ordinary day into a special one of magic and enchantment, before it disappeared again, so rapidly and "apparently so easily that it may almost have seemed as if nothing had really happened at all." Those who lingered and watched the teardown would often be overcome by a kind of melancholia. Part of it sprang from envy of the strange people who would travel through the night to set up their magic world in another place, but the sadness also came from the unhappy reminder that "all things on earth are temporal." Indeed, it proved temporal, for with the passing of the tented railroad circus, something else was lost, "that undefinable something that made circus day a day eagerly awaited and long remembered."

The heyday of the circus produced some brilliant and remarkable performers who truly earned their status as stars. Their dedication to their chosen specialties often became obsessive and contrasted strongly with the mediocre versatility that today's circus owners and producers seek in modern day performers. These extraordinary people

personified the fast food ad that claims they do one thing, and one thing right.

After exploring some early circus history, Eckley discusses the performers he believes were the very best; before he takes a final short look at the decline of the American circus. Few would argue with his choices of Alfred Court, Mabel Stark, and Clyde Beatty as the best of the trainers. Eckley's uncle, Ernie Sylvester, was long associated with Beatty, and the author remembers as a boy meeting the cat man and staying at his home in Fort Lauderdale. His essay on Beatty is particularly delightful, and his comparison of Beatty with the fictional Jay Gatsby as a man who "sprang from his own conception of himself," is very insightful.



Eckley then writes of the equestrians: May Wirth, one of the three greatest stars of the American Circus; Ella Bradna; the courageous Riding Rudy-noffs; and the Cristianis, who he considers the greatest of all circus families. With the end of the tented railroad circus, an end also came to "the kind of unrelenting family discipline and gnawing hunger to excel that was so much the hallmark of the Cristianis. . . ." The wire acts draw Eckley's attention next. First the low wire performers: Bird Mill-

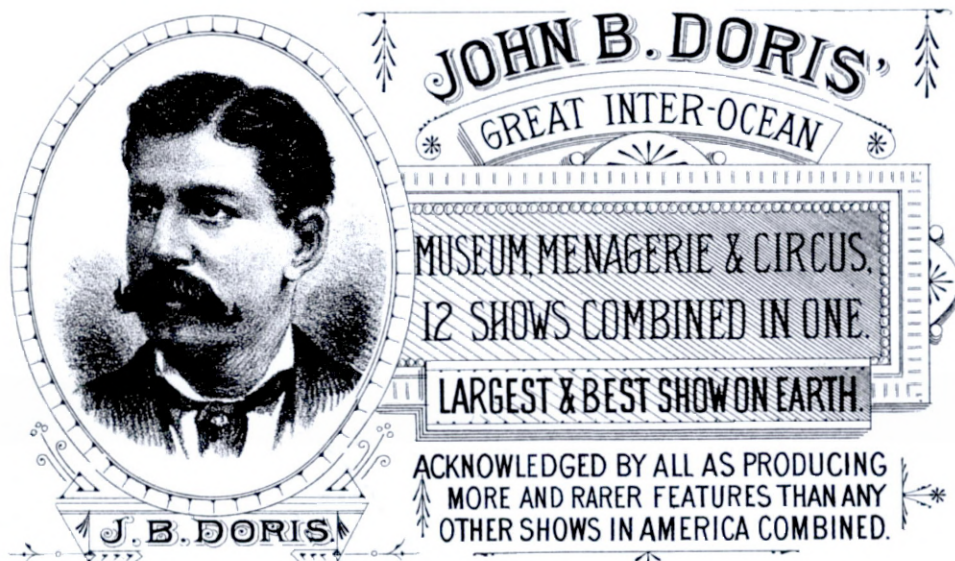
man; Con Colleano; and Hubert Castle, all who had enormous talent but who "could not catch the circus goer's heart in the throat as did the acts of those troupes that risked their lives on the high wire." Eckley presents an interesting essay based on an interview with the sensational Harold Alzana, and finishes with a piece on the Wallendas.

An historic look at clowns follows with special attention given to Dan Rice, Slivers Oakley, Butch Landolf, Pat Valdo, and the author's favorites; Otto Griebeling and Emmett Kelly. He writes finally about the act that can hold the attention of the circus goer like none other—the flying act. No surprises here, as Eckley honors Arthur and Antoinette Concello; Alfredo Codona; and "an aerialist who, though not a flier, may have been the greatest of all performers who worked high in the big top — or anywhere in the big top; the incomparable Lillian Leitzel."

The American Circus is a book that can easily be read in an evening or two. It is excellent not because of new information, but because of the way it captures an era succinctly, yet dramatically. It will leave the veteran circus reader with a feeling of sadness, nostalgia, and even a hint of anger of what is gone, never to return. For those unfamiliar with American circus history, I can think of no better basic circus book that captures the feeling of the golden age of the circus and the aura of its most dazzling stars.

Joanne Joys

BILL KASISKA'S LETTERHEADS



John B. Doris was a well known showman of the 1880s. He ordered a large number of lithographs from the Strobridge firm which designed and engraved this letterhead in 1883. It is printed in black. The Doris show continued through the 1886 season and in 1887 it was titled Doris & Colvin. The show failed and left Strobridge with a large unpaid balance.

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Billposters have used this shed at Hartland, Wisc. for years. In this 1945 photo, the monkey poster attracts attention. Authors' photo.

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